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A Bad Lot.*

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"A TRAGIC BLUNDER," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHRISTMAS JOYS.

THE dark and dreary months of November and December—short sad days of damp and mist, of rotting leaves and lowering skies—had worn themselves away. Christmas—a wet, warm Christmas, this one—the sort of Christmas that, according to the old distich, "maketh a fat churchyard"—had come and gone. In Marshlands parish church festoons of holly and of yew, of laurel and of ivy, had been duly wreathed around the pillars and the pulpit, and had as duly hung there until they had grown stale and smelt nasty, drooping limply and disconsolately in their places, unromantically displaying the string that contrived their being, and dropping a little shower of red and black berries down upon the pavement or the cushions of the pews below them, where they had been either sat upon by the worshippers or squashed under their feet, as the case might be. Then, by the time the sacred edifice had become well permeated by the nauseous and fever-breeding odours of decaying vegetable matter, the vicar had at length ordered their removal; and his parishioners breathed anew as they realized, with a deep sense of relief, that the blessed season with its time-honoured customs was drawing to a close.

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Christmas Day itself had been got over very satisfactorily at Marshlands House. The bills had not yet begun to drop in with their customary punctuality—that was still a pleasure to come—so that Gordon Forrester's peace of mind was as yet untroubled, and for the moment he had forgotten the Nemesis of future doom; for he had the enviable faculty of living in the present moment, and of shutting his eyes to anything that was not thrust too conspicuously under his nose.

As he sat at the head of his own table on Christmas evening, one would not have imagined him to have a care in the world.

Lady Forrester had supplied the usual turkey, and an old club acquaintance had opportunely sent him a small hamper of excellent champagne. He happened still to have a little money left from his last levy on his future son-in-law, and his daughters were all with him. What more could a man desire?

"My dear children, and you, my friends," he said, smiling benignly to the right and left of him, "it makes me very happy to see you all around me."

Cecil Roscoe was not there; he had been authoritatively claimed by his mother, a claim which Nell secretly thought he might very well have laid aside, but to which she had made no open objection; she was getting accustomed to Cecil's views upon his duty to his mother by this time, and she did not resent his absence very deeply, or perhaps it was only that she did not care over much whether he was present or absent.

The family circle was, however, enlarged by the addition of Captain Toulmin, who had been unable to get leave, and who, never a very lively person at any time, was for the nonce plunged into the deepest melancholy at the hardness of his fate; and also by Mr. Popham, whose own belongings bored him, and who had purposely remained at Fenchester over Christmas Day in order to escape the ordeal of a family gathering.

"If you had four maiden aunts, and sixteen nephews and nieces all under ten years of age, who all insisted on giving you wet kisses twice a day, you wouldn't be in a hurry to find yourself in the bosom of your family, either," remarked Mr. Popham, as he took his seat contentedly at Dottie's right hand. "I find it ever so much jollier here than at home. One can say what one likes without being afraid of setting everybody by the ears in this house; and one is not bothered to dress for dinner or

entreated to wipe one's boots on the door mat. Cheer up, Toulmin; you don't know when you are well off, old fellow."

"But nobody gives me wet kisses at home," replied the mournful one dejectedly; "and I must say it's beastly hard lines of the colonel to refuse me my leave when I told him I particularly wanted to go home for Christmas—not but what you are all very kind, Miss Forrester," he added politely.

"Captain Toulmin is in love with his cousin Florence," remarked Millie remorselessly, and perhaps a little spitefully, for Dottie and Millie were charming to their admirers so long only as there was no rival in the field to lead them astray into the meshes of matrimony.

"Oh, Miss Millie!" cried the captain, blushing furiously.

"It is quite true; you told me so yourself. Why were you such a duffer as to tell me if you didn't want me to repeat it? I always repeat things. She has got some money," continued Millie, looking round the table amiably and blandly, "or else Tooley couldn't marry her. He would have married me if I had had any money, he tells me. I've proposed to him several times, and he always gives me the same answer. So now he has to fall back on his cousin. It is very unfortunate—we are both of us blighted beings—still it can't be helped."

"You shouldn't make fun of a fellow like that, Miss Millie," murmured the unfortunate captain confusedly; but no one allowed him to nurse his melancholy—he was plied with champagne and made to join in the family jokes. They drank Nell's health vociferously at dessert, with all sorts of details concerning the future prosperity of her married life, and with a ringing cheer in her honour led by Gordon Forrester himself, so that all the dogs instantly conceived it to be their bounden duty to chime in too, and the old room re-echoed with their noisy barkings; and then Dottie jumped up from her place and ran round the table and flung her arms boisterously about her sister's neck.

"Dear little Nell," she cried tearfully, "you won't be with us next Christmas—not as you are now—you will be a married woman then—oh, how funny it seems to think of!—and your husband will be with us too then, I hope."

"He ought to have been with us now," cried Mr. Forrester. "Fill your glasses once more and let us drink Cecil's health too."

And of course Nell herself drank her lover's health. But when

she came to reflect upon the noise and the excitement about her—the loud hilarity of her family, which was perhaps in a measure owing to the unusual appearance of champagne bottles of an irreproachable brand upon the table—she said in her heart, not for the first time that day:

“I am very glad he is not here. He would not understand them in the least; he would only have looked solemn and disapproving, and it would have spoilt their enjoyment.”

It was at this Christmas dinner that the Miss Forresters heard for the first time about that wonderful theatrical entertainment to be given in January by the officers quartered in Fenchester, upon whose unforeseen consequences the inhabitants of Fenshire continue to dilate unto this day.

It was to be an amateur burlesque, written expressly for the occasion, and was to be acted entirely by the officers and men themselves, the proceeds—if any—to go to the County Hospital.

The Miss Forresters were naturally very full of interest and delight. Mr. Popham, who was upon the committee of management and who also expected to be one of the actors in the performance, was able to inform them that the first and most important step of all had already been taken—that of engaging the theatre in the town for the occasion. It had happened most fortunately that, between the tours of two provincial companies, the building had been entirely disengaged for three consecutive evenings; this would give them a dress rehearsal and two performances. The play, which was entitled “*Pyramus the Pirate*,” was finished and put into print. The parts were very nearly cast; all in fact was in full swing of preparation already. Mr. Popham himself was to be a pirate—there were to be several of these gentlemen. The ladies’ parts were not yet arranged, but their mutual friend Drake, by reason of his smooth pink and white face and general qualifications, might very possibly be cast for the part of “the savage queen, *Eatyeupdea*,” the heroine of the piece.

“Of course you must all come to the show,” added Mr. Popham. “You must come the first evening, that will be the best; the second night we intend to make the prices lower and to have a larger pit in order to attract the townspeople and the farmers; but at the first performance there will be quite a distinguished audience. I expect there will be a tremendous rush for places

directly we get the bills out next week. Will you have dress circles or stalls, sir? the dress circles are very good places."

"Put me down for the best box in the house," cried Gordon Forrester, flushed with wine and enthusiasm, and bringing his fist down upon the table in order to emphasize the magnificence of his generosity. "None of your dress circles, my boy; the very best box, I tell you. Gad, sir, I was always a patron of the drama in my young days—acted in a farce myself once. It's not likely, is it? that I shall fail to patronize my friends in their noble efforts in the cause of charity. A hospital, my dear boy; a hospital, I say, calls out the finest feelings of human nature. The best box, I tell you. What's that you say, Nell? the second night cheaper, you say? Oh, blow the expense! Who is going to be economical at Christmas time, and when there is a hospital at stake? You reserve me the biggest box in the house, Popham, and, by Jove!" looking round the table triumphantly, "if you doubt me, why, I'll pay for it now!" and in the fervour of the moment Mr. Forrester actually pulled a small handful of sovereigns out of his waistcoat pocket.

There was a moment of paralyzed silence, during which his daughters exchanged glances of positive terror. Was their father about to have a fit? When had he ever been known to offer ready money down in his life before? surely he must be going to be ill; but Popham, who had not lived in vain, was equal to the occasion; he stretched forth his hand promptly, and closed his fingers deftly upon three of the golden sovereigns in his host's open palm.

"That will do it, sir; I'll let you off the odd shillings for booking. Many thanks," slipping the sovereigns securely into his own pocket. "I'll see to it; you shall have the very best box in the house."

Gordon Forrester remained for half-a-second open-mouthed and speechless; it was perfectly horrible to him to be taken so literally at his word. He glanced blankly first at the quick-witted Popham and then back at the diminished store of coins in his hand; these he proceeded to restore in double quick time to his pocket, then looking down the table a little shamefacedly he was heard to murmur apologetically to himself, "Well, well, it's Christmas time, and in the cause of charity, and," with a little sigh of regret, "it can't be helped now!"

Cecil came down to Marshlands for New Year's Day, and by the new year the epidemic of Christmas bills had set in with a rush, and Mr. Forrester was proportionally a wiser and a sadder man than he had been a week ago. For though harvests may fail and trade may languish; though banks may break and business be at a standstill, yet never so long as the earth endureth shall this plague of the Christmas bill be minished or done away with. It is the one crop that never falls short; the one certainty amongst all the changes and chances of this mortal life that can for ever be reckoned upon as unchangeable.

There is a cruel relentlessness about this annual pestilence, for, be our Christmas sad or gay, dull or merry, are we glad as marriage bells, or mournful as death and sickness can render us, it makes no sort of difference to these our tormentors. They have no pity and no forbearance; they may be expected to appear as confidently as green leaves in summer time. Scarcely has the old year died out in gloom and disappointment, and whilst yet his insolent young successor is holding out to us his usual fallacious prophecies and promises of new hope and new good fortune, than the pestilence is upon us in full and overwhelming fury, and the hopes and promises, God help us! are too often but a delusion and a fraud, whilst the bills are a bitter and tangible reality.

They were never lacking at Marshlands House, as it will be easily imagined.

Cecil arrived at the moment when the storm of them was the fiercest, and suffered accordingly, both in his temper and in his pocket. In his temper, because he detested the extravagance and improvidence, and the ill management that almost amounted to dishonesty, which caused his future father-in-law to be so overwhelmed and so assailed; and in his pocket because it was wholly impossible to him to sit by and do nothing to try and help him out of the quagmire of utter insolvency which threatened imminently to overwhelm him.

"When I am dead those words will be found written upon my heart, Cecil," groaned Gordon Forrester with tragical intensity as he pointed to a pile of documents in front of him, most of them containing but three brief words, pregnant with his doom, "*To account rendered.*"

Cecil spent a whole morning shut up with his host in the

library over those long files of bills and over certain lawyers' letters which had supplemented many of them. Before he would do anything to help him, he insisted upon getting thoroughly to the bottom of the difficulties, and the more he went into them the deeper grew his disgust and the greater became his indignant condemnation; for to Cecil's orderly and business-like mind the state of chaos into which Gordon Forrester's affairs had drifted was positively sinful. The money, of which there had been plenty at one time, had been literally frittered away; years of improvidence had borne their natural fruit, utter neglect and sheer idleness often accounted for the absolute collapse of some of his investments, whilst a reckless extravagance or a totally uncalled for and spasmodic generosity had in innumerable instances swept away large sums that should have been applied to the defraying of his debts. Everything was in the direst confusion; he kept no accounts and his cheque book displayed nothing but blank counterfoils; his expenses were wholly unaccounted for; important items had been either inserted at random from memory, or else omitted altogether. It was a veritable Augean stable which Cecil had set himself to work to investigate. It soon became clear to him that unless something were done, and that very speedily, to set him on his legs again, there was nothing for Gordon Forrester but the Bankruptcy Court. As this catastrophe would have been exceedingly unpleasant and humiliating to himself on the eve of his marriage with Nell, Cecil came to the conclusion that for his own credit's sake it would be absolutely necessary to him to avert this calamity until, at any rate, he had taken his wife safely away from the impending crash.

He was not exactly prepared—as Gordon Forrester really seemed to have some idea that he might be—to make a present of several thousand pounds to his father-in-law, but he suggested to him that he should make to him a loan of about £350 in order to meet the most pressing of the claims upon him, and to stave off for a time at least the impending ruin which threatened him. This money he proposed to raise himself on a certain security, which should take the form of a bill of sale upon the furniture of Marshlands House. This furniture, in point of fact, appeared to be the one and only possession which Gordon Forrester could lawfully call his own; everything else that had ever belonged to

him had been mortgaged long ago, and would be at the mercy of his creditors the moment the breath was out of his body.

"Of course, in the event of your death, sir," said the young man, and Gordon looked very much upset; he thought it extremely heartless and unfeeling to speak in such a casual fashion of so terrible a contingency; but Cecil was quite unaware of having hurt Mr. Forrester's feelings, and went on calmly with his proposition: "In the event of your death a third of the furniture would come to me absolutely as my wife's portion, whilst I should be willing to allow her sisters the use of the remainder upon the payment of the interest which would represent their shares." Cecil himself considered this proposition an exceedingly fair and liberal one, but Gordon Forrester looked upon it as altogether brutal and unfeeling.

"In his place," he thought, "I should have given him the money outright, and said no more about it. When I was a youngster and had a little money of my own, I used to be ready enough to give to a friend in need—gentlemen in my day didn't take bills of sale on a friend's tables and chairs, and mention his death in this heartless manner, or talk about the interest to be paid by his fatherless girls on a paltry two hundred pounds! We left all that sort of thing to the Jews when I was a young man. But, ah! the world isn't what it used to be! They are a sordid lot, these young fellows of the present day—always keeping an eye open to the main chance. There isn't a spark of real generosity or gentlemanlike feeling amongst them."

Which, considering that Cecil had already given him fifty pounds, and was offering to lend him three hundred and fifty more, and that he was, moreover, prepared to marry his daughter without a penny of her own in the world, was, to say the least of it, an exceedingly ungrateful train of thought.

But as there was no other solution of the situation open to him, he was perforce compelled to accept the unwelcome terms held out to him, with as much outward show of gratitude as he could decently summon up.

He was the more ready to agree to anything and everything, because after an hour and a half of it, he was beginning to be thoroughly bored with the whole subject. Moreover, a faint winter sunshine had struggled out over the flat country, and the wide flooded fields far away glittered and shone under its beams

like a network of distant lakes. Gordon Forrester, who had perhaps something of his daughter Nell's love of the country and of country pursuits, thought it would be vastly more amusing to go out with his gun over his shoulder and his old pointer bitch Nancy at his heels, and see if he could not pick up a plover or so on the farther side of the wide and swollen lake.

"Money, money!" he groaned at last. "I am sick to death of it all. Do exactly as you like, Cecil; I'll sign anything. A quiet life is all I ask; it ain't much to want, is it? Look at the sunshine out yonder—that is much better for one to dwell upon than all this pother and fuss. For God's sake, let us get out! Go and find Nell and do a bit of spooning, my boy, for a change."

But somehow the "spooning," as Gordon irreverently termed it, fell rather flat after that morning spent in her father's library.

Cecil was preoccupied and annoyed. Although nothing had been said to that effect, he felt instinctively that Nell's father had not received his overtures in a friendly or grateful spirit, and he resented his lack of appreciation of the efforts he was prepared to make on his behalf. Nell, who knew nothing about it, was vaguely hurt and estranged by his unaccountable coldness and abstraction of manner, and she also, on the occasion of this visit, became aware of a total change in his manner towards her sisters. Hitherto he had treated them both with a kind and perfectly good-humoured toleration, and although Nell was well aware that their fast noisiness was not at all to his taste, yet she had given him credit for the friendly and thoroughly fraternal attitude which he had always maintained towards them. Now he seemed all at once to be scarcely able to tolerate their presence. To Dottie more especially he exhibited such an unconcealable aversion that it almost amounted to positive incivility.

Dottie herself was not at all slow to perceive this unpleasant change in his manner.

"What has come to your young man, Nell?" she said to her sister when they went up to bed that night. "What have I done to offend him, pray?"

"I am sure I don't know, Dottie," faltered Nell. "What makes you ask?"

"Why, he hasn't spoken three words to me since he has been in the house. He almost turns his back on me if I say

anything, and just now, when I went to wish him good-night, he pretended not to see my outstretched hand and went on with his book. I think it is downright rude."

So did Nell, but she was totally unable to give any reason for his behaviour.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST ACT.

THE original amateur burlesque, expressly written and composed for the occasion by Captains Lenny and Barker, of Her Majesty's 110th Foot, and entitled "Pyramus the Pirate," as advertised in large posters all over the town and county, was to be performed for the first time at the Theatre Royal, High Street, Fenchester, on Thursday, the 20th of January.

Long before the eventful day arrived expectation was on tiptoe and speculation had run riot amongst both high and low concerning it. Nothing so exciting and so novel had occurred in this sleepy and dead-alive eastern corner of the world for many years back. They had had balls, of course, and they had had agricultural shows and tennis tournaments. They had also had theatrical companies of more or less fame and merit in their midst, and of course they had had concerts, lectures and conjurors' shows galore. But an amateur theatrical performance, given by the military contingent in the town theatre—not an invitation affair to the gentry only, but a *bonâ fide* public entertainment, at which every man, woman and child might be present by paying for their places—was an entire and most refreshing novelty.

By the time the day of the first performance arrived every available seat in the little theatre had been booked and secured, an extra row of stalls had to be added, and cane chairs had been placed down the gangways, in every space and corner where a cane chair could possibly be crammed in, and it had been agreed to make no reduction of prices for the second night. The burlesque promised, in fact, to be a gigantic success—financially, at any rate; and even the hospital authorities, who had not hoped for very much at the outset, began to feel mildly excited over the prospects of that surplus which was to find its way eventually into the coffers of the institution. Already, in view of the growing importance of the proceedings, some of the

original views of the committee had become considerably expanded and enlarged. The ladies' parts, for instance, were no longer to be at the mercy of the subalterns of the various depôts, but were to be filled by professional actresses from London, and a qualified stage manager had been engaged, who, it was hoped, would introduce into the proceedings a tone and a finish unattainable to unaided amateur efforts. The dresses also had been ordered from a London costumier and were rumoured to be of the most original and even startling description, whilst certain members of the company who were to dance in solos or in combination had on several occasions gone up to town in order to be carefully drilled and trained by a professional instructor in the art of stage gyrations. All these things had leaked out, as of course they were bound to do, through the different friends and acquaintances of the officers and soldiers who were to take part in the performance, and served to keep anticipation at its highest. Amongst other details it was said that the major of the 200th was to dance a hornpipe, and that Messrs. Popham and Drake, of the 110th, would be seen in a "flying duet," which, for activity, grotesque comedy and wild rapidity of movement, would, it was rumoured, be totally unprecedented in the annals of amateur terpsichorean efforts.

Nobody but the privates and non-commissioned officers and their wives and children, who were admitted gratis, were allowed to be present at the dress rehearsal, but the most highly-coloured reports of an extraordinary success and of the talent displayed eked out through this possibly partial audience on the following morning, and enhanced the eagerness with which every one else was looking forward to the entertainment.

The long-looked-for evening of the 20th came at last, and long before the curtain went up the little provincial playhouse was packed and crammed from the floor up to its topmost gallery. As had been anticipated, the county magnates had risen to the occasion in force, the dress circle, as well as the boxes and the stalls, being well filled by the cream of Fenshire society. A large double box to the right was occupied by the party from Redstoke Castle and their friends. The Stanfords of Towsett Hall occupied another opposite to it, whilst the party from Dinely, having been somewhat late in applying for places, had been obliged to content themselves with eight stalls in the very

last row, next to the pit. There were the dean and his daughter and the canons and the minor canons from the Close, and there were all the little people, too, as well as the great ones—the bankers, their wives and daughters, the doctor and the solicitor, the veterinary surgeon and the proprietor of the George Hotel. There were also the country clergy from their vicarages, with their wives and families—in short, there was hardly a familiar face from town or country that was not to be seen at that memorable and truly representative gathering. It created some little surprise and interest amongst all these people when the large stage box on the lower tier, that had remained for some time unoccupied, was suddenly filled by Mr. Gordon Forrester, of Marshlands, accompanied by his three daughters.

Mr. Forrester, in irreproachable dress clothes and a white waistcoat, was radiant. He waved his hand across the house to Lord Redstoke and bowed low to her cold, proud ladyship. Then he scanned the faces of the crowd in the stalls through his long-unused opera-glasses, and nodded and smiled with some ostentation at those amongst them with whom he had always had a slight acquaintance, or who had latterly taken him slightly into favour by reason of his daughter's engagement. He was perfectly happy to-night, for his difficulties had been tided over for the present without any exertion on his part. The creditors and the duns and the lawyers who threatened writs and executions had been temporarily silenced—in short, as he put it himself with pathetic earnestness, "The wicked have ceased from troubling, and the weary are consequently at rest."

Dottie and Millie leaned well forward over the edge of the box and stared about them boldly and without any inconvenient shyness in either voice or attitude. They hardly knew anybody present, it is true, save by sight, excepting the non-acting officers who were scattered about amongst the audience, but they made the most of the greetings they sent across the house to these, and as they had both rigged themselves out in new white dresses trimmed with scarlet ribbons for the occasion, they did not see in the least why they should hide their light under a bushel. Dottie's voice, in fact, that was never a very gentle one, and was apt to be raised unconsciously in moments of excitement and exultation, rang out quite audibly and clearly all over the theatre, in a way which concentrated the amused or scandalized attention

of numerous opera-glasses upon the box. As for Nell, she sat far back in her corner and hoped that nobody would see her. Cecil had not come down for the occasion ; he had promised her that he would do so, but just as they sat down to dinner a telegram had been put into her hand to say that he was prevented from leaving town by business. Nell handed the telegram round the table, and everybody said it was a great pity ; Nell said nothing at all.

In the depths of her heart she was haunted by the humiliating conviction that Cecil did not want to be seen in a public place with her family.

"He is ashamed of us," she thought ; "he never intended to come ; I was certain of it from the first ; he could have come if he liked ; the telegram is nothing but an excuse." And as she leant back in the box, her heart swelled a little hotly and angrily within her at the thought, and instinctively she sided with her own flesh and blood against him. Why should he be ashamed of her father and sisters ? He knew well enough what they were before he came amongst them, and if he had disliked them all so much, why had he come to Marshlands for a wife ? And Nell told herself resolutely that Cecil should never separate her from her own belongings ; for was it not mainly for their sakes that she was marrying him ? She would stand by them always—always.

Then the curtain went up and a deafening round of applause greeted the first scene, which represented a desert island in the Pacific Ocean, upon which the story began. Nell bent forward with the rest to look, and far away in the last row of the stalls some one who sat amongst the party from Dinely Hall caught a glimpse of that gold-crowned head as it shone for a moment under the light of the gas. It was all that he had come for—just to see her afar off, and without being seen himself. She did not see him, her eyes were riveted upon the stage. Her sisters made room for her to sit between them, and she leant forward eagerly and delightedly. Nell had only been once in her life before to a theatre in London, and she was young and full of capacity for enjoyment. She left off thinking about Cecil—she forgot him, in fact, altogether—and she threw herself heartily and with keen appreciation into what was going on on the stage. The burlesque went very well : there was plenty of incident and

plenty of fun in it; comic dances and comic scenes succeeded each other rapidly, and there were a great many comic songs, the words of which had been written expressly for the occasion, and which contained numberless allusions to local politics and persons, all proving highly diverting to the audience; roars of laughter and vociferous encores greeted each stage of the performance, and Nell laughed and applauded with the rest, and thought it all very amusing and delightful. The first act culminated in the grand finale of the "Flying Duet" between Messrs. Popham and Drake, with a chorus of savages and pirates in the background. Three times were these energetic young gentlemen recalled amidst the deafening plaudits of the audience, and compelled to give an encore of this highly successful and truly wonderful exploit. How they skipped and how they jumped! how wildly and dexterously their long legs in black trunk hose whirled above each other's heads, and with what amazing rapidity they pursued one another in flying leaps and bounds and pirouettes backwards and forwards across the stage. It was really astonishing, as everybody said, how two such quiet-mannered and unassuming-looking young fellows as they were known to be in their private capacity should have, in so short a time, developed such an extraordinary and hitherto wholly unsuspected talent. Where could they have learnt it? the puzzled and delighted audience asked of one another; how, in six weeks or so, could they possibly have attained to such almost professional excellence? It was truly wonderful, and nobody was more astonished or laughed more heartily than the colonel of the 110th himself, who roared and shouted till the tears ran down his fat red cheeks, and who clapped his hands till he split his white gloves, that were several sizes too small for him, right across the middle of the backs.

So the first act came to a triumphant and glorious conclusion, and even when the curtain had finally fallen the audience went on shouting and screaming itself hoarse, and refused to be silenced until Poppet and Ducky had come forward in front of it, panting and smiling and bowing their grateful acknowledgments for the reception accorded to them.

"They are the heroes of the evening," cried Dottie excitedly, as she sprang to her feet. "Come along, girls; you know we are to go behind the scenes between the acts; Poppet made me

promise; here's Tooley come to fetch us. Why, he is actually laughing; wonders will never cease. Come on, Gordie; of course you'll come with us, and, Nell, put on your cloak quickly, child. You don't mean to say you aren't coming? Why, it will be the best fun of the whole evening; they have got light refreshments in Ducky's room; only just a select few—ourselves and some of the boys—are invited. Oh, don't be a little goose, Nell; come out and have a cup of tea, at any rate."

"I had really rather not, Dottie. I had sooner sit quiet; it is so hot, and I have a headache."

"Silly little mouse," said Dottie indulgently.

"Oh, don't press her if she had sooner sulk alone," remarked Millie rather crossly.

"Take care not to sit in the draught of the door, my love," said her father kindly; "there is a wind comes in under that door enough to cut one's feet off."

And then they all went off noisily together, escorted by Captain Toulmin, and Nell was left by herself.

She came a little to the front of the box, so that her fair head and the pure outlines of her profile were quite visible to the occupants of the stalls below, and she sat very quietly by herself, not looking about amongst the people in the house, of whom she knew but very few indeed, save by sight only, but amusing herself by looking over the words of the songs in the programme.

Intervals between the acts in an amateur performance are wont to be unusually long, but surely no interval ever prolonged itself so unduly as this one. Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes went by, and still there came no sign or token of a renewal of the play. Nobody, however, seemed to care, or even to notice what a long time it was—everybody was employed in talking to everybody else, for every one present was in the midst of friends; the stall-holders were leaning back towards the seats behind, or stretching forwards over to those in front; the dress circles were calling out their greetings and criticisms to the boxes, or to those below them; the boxes were crowded with visitors from different parts of the house, and a hum and buzz of conversation and laughter went on all round. Only Nell sat on quite alone by herself.

She was possibly the first person in the whole of the crowded theatre to whom it occurred that the interval of waiting was protracting itself to most abnormal length. She began to wonder

whether the scenery had gone wrong, or if Miss Sybellina Montmorency, advertised as "the lovely love-lorn daughter of Pyramus the pirate," had lost her temper or her voice, and whether there had arisen any difficulty about her coming to the front with the rising of the curtain, as Nell knew she was meant to do, with a solo in her well-known best music-hall manner. Some hitch or other there surely must be in the proceedings, she thought; but why on earth did not her father and the girls come back to the box? They could not be eating cakes and drinking tea all this time; they must be dreadfully in the way amongst the actors.

Yet still the minutes slipped away and they did not return; neither did the curtain go up.

The music of the interlude—it was, of course, a military band, stationed between the front row of the stalls and the footlights—had ceased to play; the musicians had exhausted all their *répertoire*, and had even repeated some part of it. Now they were all sitting mum and silent, with their flutes and fifes and drums in their hands.

Then all at once it struck Nell that something unusual was going on behind the close-drawn curtain of the stage. There was certainly a disturbance of some kind or other; there were footsteps hurrying backwards and forwards, and voices, not hushed and subdued as would have been natural, but loud and agitated; a female voice was raised in something that distinctly resembled a scream; then came a confusion of cries and noises, shouts and directions, arising all together in a babel of mingling voices, and above and over them all there came a dull low ominous roar, like the breaking of storm-waves upon a shingly shore.

Simultaneously, the whole of the waiting and patient audience became shaken with some new emotion—as a forest is suddenly shaken by a blast of wind; the gay chattering voices were silenced; a shivering whisper went round, and here and there a sharp question or a terrified exclamation arose. Then men sprang up in their places and asked loudly what was wrong; women cried out or turned faint, and clung to one another, clutching frantically at their cloaks and wraps; and all at once the curtain moved aside, and the stage manager, very pale and with disordered hair and dress, stepped out alone before the footlights.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he called out in a loud, clear voice, "pray keep your seats and do not get frightened. I entreat you to take your time, and to go out as quietly and orderly as possible."

"What is it? What is wrong?" came in a yell from a hundred terrified voices.

The stage manager never answered that question.

The answer to it came of itself, and with a deadly and overwhelming certainty.

From the side of the flies nearest to the stage box where Nell Forrester was sitting alone, there crept out slowly and stealthily a long thin brownish grey wisp of smoke, that curled its way softly and tortuously upwards towards the great gas chandelier that hung from the painted ceiling. Then, immediately following it, a swift fine jet of quivering flame shot out sharp and clear as a serpent's tongue.

Then, once again, the smoke.

To all whom it concerned to know—and it concerned them all—the truth was as patent as daylight.

The theatre was on fire!

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACT THE SECOND.

READER, have you ever been in a panic? If you have not, thank your God that you have not witnessed one of the most horrible sights that this world can exhibit, and continue to pray to your life's end that you may be spared the appalling experience.

For a panic is, perhaps, the most terrible of all those many dire calamities which at divers times and seasons are wont to wreak their vengeance upon a doomed and misguided humanity.

There are perils of the winds and perils of the sea; there are perils of earthquakes and perils of flood and of fire—yet all these are natural agencies; the forces of nature in active rebellion against the laws that govern and restrain them. What is so terrible about a panic is that it is entirely the work of man himself—the distorted nightmare of his own imagination; the fictitious creation of that maddening, soul-benumbing passion, to which we give the name of Fear.

And if to fire—fire that is of itself so tremendous a power—a power with which all the science and all the wit on earth has as yet been but feebly able to cope—if to fire there be super-added the panic of human fear, then, indeed, the situation is a desperate one.

Inside the Theatre Royal at Fenchester that twofold horror of fire and of panic had now broken loose in all its terrible reality. In vain had the pale and trembling stage manager entreated the audience not to lose its self-control and its presence of mind; to take its time and to go out quietly and without undue haste. That curling wreath of smoke, that keen swift-shooting tongue of flame, had been enough to scatter all his wise and prudent counsels to the winds. The occupants of the stalls indeed had made a vigorous effort to act upon his advice; there were shouts from the seats below to those above and behind, shouts of "keep your seats," "sit still," "don't crush out;" but their words of command and entreaty might as well have been spoken to the waves of the sea. The pit and galleries were past all sense and reason, and the awful crush of human beings, each one struggling for his own life and regardless of the life of others, began in all its hideous intensity.

If they had taken it quietly at first there would in all probability have been plenty of time and to spare for all to have got out in safety; but the demon of panic had got its grip upon them, and they were beyond the reach of argument or appeal.

In a dense mass of struggling, fighting humanity, the seething crowd rushed madly and frantically towards the different exits of the theatre. These exits, all of them narrow doorways, leading down tortuous and ill-constructed stone staircases, became in a few seconds the scenes of the most horrible and heart-rending catastrophes. Women and children, and even strong men, were pushed down and fell one on the top of the other, and were trampled upon and crushed to death under the feet of the on-rushing tide. Above the roar of the flames behind, fearful screams and groans and curses rent the air, and the pale terrified faces, bruised and stained with blood, of those who either kept their footing or were carried on helplessly by the crushing of those behind them, testified sufficiently to the hopeless horror of that human stampede, whose end is too often a cruel and dreadful death

And all the time the fire increased and strengthened its hold upon the stage, pouring forth great volumes of dense black smoke, lit up now and again by the lurid gleam of the flames into the body of the house.

It was an awful sight—a sight to haunt the whole after life of those who saw it, and to leave its impression stamped for ever upon the memory.

Nell stood up in the box and looked at it. She was pale as death, and a wild horror was in her eyes. She did not think of her own danger, or of how she herself was to escape; she was not frightened for herself, because the thought of her own peril had not yet come home to her—all she saw was that maddened fighting crowd; all she heard were those heart-piercing shrieks of the dying and the wounded; the shrieking of fainting women, who stumbled and fell, never to rise any more; the wail of little children in their last agony.

Oh, could nobody do any good? could nobody arrest and save them? She reached out her hands towards the upper gallery, where that most terrible tragedy was at its worst, and she, too, cried out with some of those below: "Oh, stop, stop! Come back! Oh, God, save them, save them!"

But no one heard her.

Meanwhile, her own danger increased at every instant. It was some part of the scenery at the back of the stage that had first caught fire, and the box she was in, being next to the stage, was now in imminent peril. The choking smoke that overwhelmed and blinded her awoke her suddenly to a sense of her own danger. Thick waves of smoke now filled the whole centre of the theatre, so that the terrible scenes beyond it became mercifully blotted out, and she could only hear the screams and the cries and the heartrending groans afar off.

All at once she saw that the fire had come very close to her; the heat had become intense; the smoke was so thick as to suffocate her. At first she had said to herself, "They will come back for me—some of them. I had better stay where I am. One of the men is certain to come and tell me what to do." But after a little while—it seemed, indeed, a whole eternity, although it could have been barely six or seven minutes—she began to realize that it might be impossible for any one of her party to return to her. They had all been behind the scenes.

It was obvious that they must have effected their escape from the building by the stage door, and as the fire had broken out on that side, they would certainly have been cut off from the rest of the theatre.

Then Nell realized that if she desired to escape from an awful and cruel death, she had no one but herself to depend upon. She must save herself or perish.

She groped her way to the back of the box and found her cloak, wrapped it hastily about her bare shoulders, and having with difficulty discovered the small handle of the door, she opened it. Immediately opposite to her was a staircase, and the whole of the passage was thronged by a dense mass of struggling human beings, all striving and straining and fighting hand and foot to get to the head of the stairs.

Faint and sick Nell shut to the door and shrank back into the box again—to venture alone into that crowd would be to cast herself to the almost certainty of a horrible death. It were better to perish of the smoke and of the flames than to be trampled to death beneath the feet of that maddened multitude. For the first time it came home to her that there was perhaps nothing before her but death.

She leant against the partition of the box and trembled, and a death-like faintness overpowered her for an instant. Yet she was brave even then. She pulled herself together with a tremendous effort, and struggled through the blinding smoke back to the front of the box again. It might be possible to escape that way.

"I will not die like a rat in a trap if I can help it," she said to herself aloud, and the sound of her own voice gave her courage; but the outlook on this side was not hopeful. The fire had spread, a portion of the roof above the stage was now in flames, a shower of sparks driven forward by the draught flew out into the now deserted stalls; the front row of seats was already charred and smouldering, great tongues of flame curled upwards towards the gas chandelier that hung from the centre of the roof. When they reached the gas pipes it was self-evident that there must be a terrific explosion, and that the whole roof of the theatre would collapse, and she herself, if still alive, must be buried beneath a mountain of burning ruins. Before that dreadful moment came, and it could not now be many minutes longer before it did, could

she by any means clamber over the edge of the box into the stalls below and get out by another exit? or was it already too late to escape that way? She began to experience the suffocation of which so many victims mercifully die in a fire before the flames have time to reach them. She struggled for breath and staggered blindly as she tried to get on to the edge of the box. Once she half climbed over, but a dash of black vapour and of fiery hot sparks belched up suddenly into her face from some burning woodwork below and cast her back half-stunned and stifled upon the floor of the box.

In a few seconds she lay there helpless and almost insensible, and she said to herself, "This is death," and prayed that her agony might be short.

Then out of the darkness and suffocation, above the deafening noises and the wild swift flashes of lurid light, a voice close to her spoke her name—close—quite close to her.

"Nell, are you there? Are you alive?"

Some one stumbled across her fallen body—life came back to her fainting heart with a wild keen rush of joy.

"Yes—yes, I am here; I am alive!" she cried, struggling to lift herself; and he took her up into his arms and lifted her on to her feet.

"Thank God! I was afraid I was too late." In the light of the flames she saw his pale face—smoke-grimed and stained with blood. It did not occur to her to wonder that he was there, or how he came; it was enough for her that he was with her.

"I had to go out first with one of the ladies of the Dinely party," explained Temple hurriedly. "We got them all out safely, and then I came back for you. I have had hard work to reach you. Nell, can't we get out at the back?"

He went to the door of the box as she had done, and then, as she had done also, he shut it to again quickly—that awful battle-field of raging, demented dying humanity was still pouring down the tortuous passage and flinging itself headlong down the narrow stairway. It seemed hopeless to escape that way. He came back and looked out over the box by the way he had come, but alas, even in those few short moments the fire had spread; there were but a few yards now between the licking flames and the tottering gas chandelier in the roof; and when

that was reached all hope would be over. He looked back at her blankly and miserably.

"Is it death, Julian?" she asked him softly.

He took her hands in his and crushed them hard against his breast. All pretence was at an end now. If it was death indeed for both, then in death she belonged to him. All the small things of this world fade and pale into nothingness to those who stand thus face to face with death.

"I don't care much now that you are with me," said Nell brokenly.

"There is only one hope, Nell," he answered, and his voice was rough and harsh with the agony within him. "If I can get you out along that passage, past the crush at the top of the staircase, I think there should be a window——"

"Oh, not through that awful crowd," she said, shuddering and drawing back.

"I will carry you. I swear you shall not fall," he urged. "For God's sake trust yourself to me, Nell! It is our one chance; there is nothing else; it is too late to go back the way I came. I implore you to be brave and to trust me. Nell," and there came a break in his voice, "I will be honest with you. I don't think that we shall live through it. I believe we shall meet our death out there." He laid his hands one on each of her shoulders and held her a little away from him, looking into her eyes with an intensity of love and of despair.

"I will not deceive you, dear; I cannot deceive myself. I will try to save you, but I doubt whether I can. And, Nell, before we go out there, to meet—only God knows what—there is something I want to tell you—something I do not want you—to die without knowing. It cannot injure any one now that you should know it—it cannot hurt you any more. It is only that I love you. I have never loved any one else—you are the first—you will be the last; will it not help you a little to trust me? You understand now that I shall do all I can to save you, don't you? And if we die——"

"Then at least we die together, Julian," she cried, with a sudden passionate intensity. He had said, "I love you." Even in that hour of despair nothing could quench the joy that the words brought to her. Death became robbed of half its terrors. Neither the fear of the pain nor yet the natural shrinking of the

body from a horrible and cruel fate could blot out or dull the unspeakable sweetness of those words as they rang in her ears. "At least we can die together," she repeated brokenly once more.

And then silently he took her in his arms and held her against his heart, whilst her soft arms stole up to encircle his bent head; and their lips met once in a long, long kiss, in which there was not very much, perhaps, of human passion, but in which there lay all the sad solemnity of a dying farewell. For to these two—lovers in heart if not in name—it seemed indeed as though they were standing together upon the threshold of eternity, and as though only a brief interval of bodily agony lay betwixt them and that great mystery of silence into which each of us must go down alone.

In the world that they were leaving behind there could be nothing that signified any more to them; only the love that was beyond all hope, and the death that they were going forth to meet together—all else was over and done with.

Then, without another word—for there was no time to be lost now—he covered her head up completely in her thick cloak, and lifting her in his arms, carried her out of the door into that seething, yelling crowd outside.

He was big and strong, and he was struggling for a life that was dearer to him than his own, or else perhaps he would never have got her through; for a few moments indeed he had an awful battle, during which he believed that all was lost. He had hard work to keep his footing, and the rough buffeting of the human tempest almost tore her from his arms. But he set his back against the wall, and in this way he was able to stand firm, and presently he began to gain inch by inch against the dense struggling mass, and then mercifully—almost by a miracle—all at once the crowd seemed to thin and lessen, and what he had to contend with next was no longer the panic-stricken people, but the thick volumes of fire-laden smoke which began to pour from behind him in ever-increasing strength and density along the low-ceiled, narrow passage.

Before that stifling, choking vapour even the strongest of men must in the end give way. Julian looked down once at Nell's face—her cloak had fallen a little back in the struggle. Her light figure seemed suddenly to grow heavier in his arms; he

saw that she was white as death ; her eyes were closed—she did not appear even to breathe—she was insensible—perhaps indeed she was already dead !

The thought that it might be so filled him with unutterable despair, yet still he struggled on towards the window that was now close in front of him. But he had come at last to that point when a man can do no more—breath and sight and strength, life itself failed him. Suffocated and scorched, bruised and maimed, he stumbled on for a step or two farther, till at last he fell forward heavily in a senseless heap upon the floor, beneath the window that he had struggled so hard to reach, with Nell's unconscious form still clasped tightly in his arms.

And there the firemen who, a few seconds later, came swarming up the ladders and in through that very window, found them both, locked in each other's arms, and almost past human help.

(To be continued.)

Memoirs of an Eccentric Nobleman.

By CHARLES BRUCE-ANGIER,

Author of "TWELVE DAYS IN BRITTANY," etc.

AT the commencement of this century there was no more familiar figure to be seen about the streets of London than that of a certain elderly gentleman of fine physique, and who was for the most part attired in garments of a blue shade. This was the eccentric individual known to men as Lord Coleraine, but to the gods as Colonel Hanger, or Blue Hanger—this latter sobriquet from the colour of his garments. He was of so marked a character in every society, from St. James' to St. Giles'—from the drawing-room to the dust cart—that he may be considered as one of the prominent features of his time, and as such, a brief memoir of his career may possibly amuse the reader and serve as a beacon of warning to the rising generation of his order.

Colonel the Right Hon. George Hanger, Baron Coleraine, in the peerage of Ireland, and a major-general in the army, was born at his father's seat of Driffield, in Gloucestershire, in the year 1750, being the third son of Gabriel, 4th Lord Coleraine, and grandson of a Sir George Hanger, who received the honour of knighthood from William III, "for his zeal," we are told, "in advancing the interests of his country." The odd surname of Hanger, the subject of another pun—for George Hanger was in after years described as not the "Constant Hanger," but the 'constant hanger-on' of the Prince Regent—had been adopted, *temp.* Charles I., through the marriage of one Mary Hanger, an heiress, with the cadet of another house, the history of which need not detain us. His two elder brothers held the coronet before it descended to himself, in the autumn of 1814, by which time "Geordie," as the prince used to call him, had reached the mature age of 64.

During his long life George Hanger figures by turns now as a successful gamester, afterwards as a gallant soldier in King George's army, fighting against the Americans; again, as one of the lesser stars that turned about that great luminary Beau

Brummell, a prisoner in the King's Bench, a clever author and wit, friend of Sheridan and other giants of the period of the third George, and ultimately as a flattered guest at the table of the then Prince of Wales. Like the Barrys, Earls of Barrymore, the Duke of Queensberry (familiarily termed "Old Q."), Lord Camelford, and many more, he led a life not very creditable to a member of the "upper ten thousand," though he died lamented and regretted by his numerous and varied class of acquaintance, who, to use their own words, "could have better spared a better man." From his earliest childhood he showed signs of a bold and daring nature, and thus came to be early despatched to taste the first experiences of life at Reading School. In speaking of these school days in his own "*Eccentric Life and Adventures*," which he published in 1800, he begs his friends to believe that he was a very idle boy, and never could be induced to look into a book unless it was "*forced under the shadow of my nose*." Can it be a matter of wonder, then, if the school did not prove at all to his taste, and that he describes his master as "a brute, a tyrant, and a savage?" I shall never forget his sketches of this old "tyrant," with his long rattan cane, or the description of the wales on the sides, arms and ribs of the boys as big as his finger, caused from the blows showered down by this brutal Squeers. From that establishment he was soon removed, and we next hear of him at a school in Marylebone, kept by the Rev. Mr. Fountain, where he tells a different tale, for the worthy gentleman treated the lads under him with every kindness. George's love of mischief, however, began to show itself here, for he tells us, in the autobiographical work before alluded to, that he once violently kicked on the shins the dentist who attended the school, and caught his thumb between his teeth on the unfortunate man's attempting to operate upon him a second time; George Hanger finishing up his remarks on this period of his life by informing us that whatever he learnt was from kindness and gentle treatment, "a kind word and my lessons explained had more effect than all the rods in Christendom."

Subsequently he passed on to Eton during Dr. Foster's time, where, though he got on with Latin, he set himself entirely against Greek, studying instead the newspaper and the sporting calendar. When only in the lower 4th, he made one in the great rebellion of the Eton boys against their head master. The

boys marched to Maidenhead Bridge. At Bray, about one mile distant, Hanger's father, Lord Coleraine, had a country seat, from which place the angry peer sent his groom three different times in the day to take George home, but the boy had pledged his honour to the others never to leave them, and steadily adhered to his promise, and for his honour's sake never deserted the cause. The love of strange adventure was not original in my hero George, but simply broke out afresh, as being already "in the blood," for his own aunt, Lady Coleraine, who seems to have imitated the conduct of the Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, deserted her husband, the third Lord Coleraine*, three years after their marriage, and it was twenty years before her obstinate ladyship could be induced to return to her husband's roof.

After leaving Eton he entered the army, as an ensign in the Foot Guards. It may have been at this time that the embryo soldier wrote the following quaint lines with reference to his own prospects:—

" Three pretty boys did Gabriel have ;
The youngest George by name, sir,
A funny dog, not favoured much,
By fortune or by fame, sir."

He now devoted a year to the study of mathematics, fortification and the German language at the University of Gottingen. The next two summers were spent in Hanover and Hesse Cassel, where he became acquainted with many "persons of distinction" and was much noticed by Prince Charles, brother to our own Queen Charlotte, in consequence of which he grew to be on such terms with the Hanoverian Guards as to be allowed to take part with them in their military exercise on field-days. He has the grace to own that during this three years' stay in Germany he felt the great want of the refining influence of ladies' society. Returning to England he was introduced to the great

* Celebrated as a collector of prints and drawings, which he left partly to Corpus College, Oxford, and partly to the Society of Antiquaries. He was also a great scholar and linguist, and "eminently versed in history." His grandfather Henry, the second lord, whom he succeeded in the title in 1708, was also famous as an antiquary and author. This last-named peer was the son of a distinguished Royalist, upon whom Charles I., who had a great regard for him, conferred the title in 1625, when his *protégé* was only 19 years of age.

world and "to life," as understood in those days ; indeed, in the course of his long career, he associated with men and women of every description and of every rank. It was soon after his return to England that he met with a singular adventure, which narrowly escaped having a fatal issue. One Sunday morning a particular friend of his came to him and desired that he would meet him in Kensington Gardens that evening, as he had something particular to say. Upon meeting as arranged, his friend told him that he was anxious to have some conversation with a lady, who would be in company with a female friend, whose attention to what might pass he wished George to divert by his attention to her. Presently they came up with the ladies and all four entered a side path of the gardens, close to Kensington Palace, where thick yew trees edged the walks. Suddenly a man approached in a threatening attitude, at which the women and their cavalier, fearing recognition, proposed retiring behind an adjoining hedge, leaving George Hanger to tackle the stranger, who advanced absolutely snorting and blowing with rage, and ramming his sword half through the hedge. His further approach was stopped by George. "Sir," said he "you cannot pass this way." The fellow then put his hand on his sword in a way showing plainly that he knew well enough how to use that weapon. But Hanger again warned the stranger off, saying, "Sir, for God's sake, go away. I do not wish to hurt you. It is impossible that I should be the person that you are looking for, but I swear if you advance one step further I will kill you!" At last, after many entreaties on George Hanger's part, the man put up his sword and made off the same way as he came, and George and his friends brought their walk to an end, without any further difficulty. The story was, however, buzzed about the town, and he himself owns, in his account of the matter, that though he had been placed in many disagreeable situations in life, he had never been so alarmed as on that occasion, and that though he more than suspected who were the parties concerned in this affair, yet for the lady's sake he never divulged the secret. The next few years were spent in gaiety and dissipation in town. He was said to be at this time one of the best dressed men in England, and was generally acknowledged to have been in early life a very handsome man. But in after years his appearance was marred by the singularity of his dress, To him

is awarded the honour—if it may be called so—of having been the first to bring satin coats into fashion, while it is recorded that for one winter only the lace upon his evening dress cost him £900, and that on every royal birthday he had two suits, a morning coat at £80, and a ball costume at above £180.

The magnificence, elegance, splendour and extravagance of those days cannot be described. "In my youth" says he, "a young man must have been polite, well bred, well educated, and well dressed, before he could hope to frequent the polite circles. Young men seldom came into the world till they were twenty-one, and not till they had travelled, or been in some foreign country, for a couple of years. Look at the difference now (1824); every barber dresses as well as a gentleman and wears a cockade and passes for an officer."

Again he writes: "There is no longer any elegance or refinement, none of the chivalry of the old world. Nowadays lads are thrown into the world between fourteen and fifteen, and may come into a lady's assembly, or ball room, head or tail foremost, in a trot, walk or a canter, and 'if they behave ever so rude, it is only looked upon as a levity of youth."

Even the fair sex appeared different. "Ah, my friends! there no longer exist women with the graceful figure of your grandmothers' time, none with manners like theirs. Though my hair has grown grey, and my heart cold with *ennui*, disappointment, and the treachery of friends, I have but to lean back in my chair and think, and those sweet figures come rising up before me out of the turmoils and troubles of near half a hundred years, with their smiles and their kindness and their charming coquetries."

In the year 1776, owing to a fancied wrong with regard to his promotion, George Hanger left the Guards in dudgeon, throwing up his commission. But in spite of this silly and wayward act, as soon as the first flames of the war of Revolution were kindled in America, he applied for, and obtained, an appointment as captain in one of the Hessian Jäger Corps then being raised for the British Service in America. But before his departure he had got into debt and into difficulties from his personal extravagance, and the shadows of a future day of reckoning were already crossing his path. As might be expected, the young captain.

notwithstanding his many eccentricities, made a capital soldier of fortune. Sir Henry Clinton, on meeting him in America, felt this, and not only gave him a command in the expedition for the reduction of the Southern Provinces, but made him his aide-de-camp at the siege of Charleston. He also distinguished himself in the operations at Savannah, and after the capture of Charleston was appointed inspector of volunteers, as well as of cattle, horses and stores, being promoted also to a majority in the British Legion. Whilst serving in Carolina under Lord Cornwallis, the yellow fever reduced him so low that "his bones were coming through his body."

But he escaped the jaws of death and lived to meet Lord Cornwallis some years later at dinner in St. James' Square. His illness was on this occasion a fortunate chance; for having been sent on a cruise to Bermuda, he escaped being taken prisoner with his general. Subsequently he sailed for New York with Sir Henry Clinton in the hope of relieving Lord Cornwallis, but the squadron arrived three days too late to effect that object.

That he used his eyes and "all his seven senses" in America is undoubted, seeing that even in 1802 he prophesied that the day would come when the Northern and Southern States would meet as foes in the field of battle, and that whenever the war arose it would not be "a little war." We know well how that prophecy has been fulfilled, but George Hanger was the first publicly to express it. Having served throughout the American war, he returned to England in 1782, with the rank of major in the British Legion, but reduced almost to a skeleton owing to the yellow fever, as before mentioned, and other hardships he had undergone during his seven years' campaign. It was at the celebration of Her Majesty's birthday in the year 1782, that the Honourable George Hanger, henceforth known as Major Hanger, made his first reappearance at Court and became one of the jovial associates of George Prince of Wales.

Being a major in the Hessian Service he wore his uniform at the ball, but its attributes were so exaggerated that he attracted the notice not only of the prince, but of His Majesty King George III. and the ministers in attendance.

Who is he?—whence does he come?—was asked on all sides. And when the gallant major led out the beautiful Miss Gunning

as his partner for the minuet, and put on his hat, which was ornamented with two large black and white feathers, the figure which he cut was so preposterous, and there was such an irresistible provocation to risibility in the *tout ensemble* of his appearance, that His Majesty and the whole Court were thrown into fits of laughter such as had never before been witnessed in a Royal drawing-room. For sixteen years (1782-98) the major continued one of the prince's boon companions, fulfilled the post of equerry (with a salary of £300 a year) and managed his racing matters. George Hanger was passionately fond of the turf and once stood 3,000 guineas on one race—Shark against Leviathan—and won it. He was indeed a considerable gainer by his betting transactions and kept a stud of race-horses for several years, though all through life he seems to have been subjected to strange reverses. Meanwhile, as he himself says, he had every opportunity of viewing his royal master in every stage—in health, on a sick bed, and even during his brief married life. Lord George Seymour records how, during the honeymoon of the Prince of Wales, when punch and pipes were on one occasion introduced, that “after the lady in waiting had sipped a little of the former, the bridegroom in a marked manner took her glass, whereupon the slighted bride seized Hanger’s pipe, and gave a contemptuous puff at the prince.” Were it not for Lord George’s accuracy we should be disposed to doubt the truth of this very undignified story. It was at this period that Major Hanger acquired celebrity by his geese-and-turkey wager with the prince. The story runs thus: During one of the convivial parties at Carlton House, the former designedly introduced the subject of the travelling powers of the turkey and the goose, and declared that the turkey would outstrip the goose.

The prince, who placed great reliance on the major’s judgment in subjects of this nature, backed his opinion. A match was made of twenty turkeys against twenty geese for a distance of ten miles, the race to be for £500. On the day appointed, the prince and his party of turkeys and the owner of the geese set off to decide the match. For the first three hours everything seemed to indicate that the turkeys would be the winners, as they were then two miles in advance of their rivals, but as night came on the former began to stretch their necks towards the branches of the trees which lined the sides of the road. In vain the prince

attempted to urge them on with his pole, in vain Major Hanger dislodged one from its roosting place only to see three or four others comfortably perched amongst the branches. In vain was barley strewn along the road. In the meantime, the geese came waddling on, passed the turkeys, whose backers were all busy among the trees attempting to dislodge the birds, and the geese were declared the winners.

During the last years of the eighteenth century, the major, what with his extravagance and a series of misfortunes, seems to have been unable "to make both ends meet."

He had up to this time enjoyed, besides his salary as equerry, a considerable property in Berkshire, which he tells us he lost through the death of a surveyor, whom he was employing. In 1797 he added to his reduced means by raising recruits for the East India Company, and the income derived from this employment afforded him the means of continuing to live for a time as a gentleman. His good fortune did not, however, last long; a dispute among the directors of the company threw him out of employ, robbed him of £500, which were "costs out of pocket," incurred in the establishing and organizing of agencies for recruits in the larger towns of England, and lost him an income of £600 per annum. This run of ill luck brought him on the high road to the King's Bench, which he entered in June, 1798.

He does not appear to have been well or kindly treated by his father, Lord Coleraine, or his brothers, in more ways than one. To be sure the former was long since dead, having departed this life in 1773, leaving behind him a will of seventeen codicils, in which he strictly entailed his estates on his three sons and only daughter and their male issue. Lord Coleraine had gone in early life to India, and returned after a few years with a realized fortune of £25,000 in his pockets to inherit another fortune of £100,000, which came to him from his cousin, Lady Coleraine, and to further increase his means by marrying a rich heiress, and by unexpectedly inheriting the family estates. But his lordship in after years could not find the means to keep his youngest son afloat, and his brothers allowed him to be robbed and ruined without putting forth a hand to help him. In his memoirs, Hanger bitterly complains that when on one occasion he wished to join as a volunteer the army of Count Romanzoff, then fitting

out to fight against the Turks, the rich old Lord Coleraine would not find the money for the equipment, so that he was obliged to remain in Germany, "biting his thumbs and cursing his adverse fate," and again in 1798 through the "niggardly parsimony" of his only surviving brother William, sixth Lord Coleraine, he was deprived of his earnings, thrust into prison, and afterwards forced to begin the world afresh.

He spent about ten months in "those blessed regions of rural retirement," as he jokingly styles his prison, perhaps remembering the lines of Lovelace, written in 1642 :

" Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage,
Minds innocent and peaceful take
That for a hermitage."

And he declares that he "lived there as a gentleman on three shillings a day." After arranging with his creditors, he was released from the King's Bench in the April of the following year (1799), and started again to run the course of life with £40 in his pockets. A friend, Mr. Tattersall, offered him a home in his house, which for a time he was glad to accept, while another, perhaps his old crony, "Tom Sheridan," offered him £2,000, requesting him not to think of repaying him until he should be a rich man. But George Hanger only took £100, saying he knew he never should be able to repay him, and held it dishonest to borrow a sum so large that he could never repay. It was now that he formed the resolution of taking to trade, and set up at one time as a coal merchant, and at another as a dealer in powder for the special purpose of setting razors. Specimens of this powder he carried about in his pockets, in order to show to persons of quality, whom he canvassed for their patronage. In the year 1800, he writes, "May the black diamond trade flourish with me ; twice have I begun the world anew, may the present century be more favourable to me than the last. *Valete et plaudite.*

" Carbones nigri
Sunt mihi deliciæ, sint mihi divitiæ."

But, as he subsequently mentions a kind friend who gave him a salary sufficient to keep the wolf from the door, in all probability he did not make one of those gigantic fortunes which the

black-diamond owners and merchants are in the habit of realizing nowadays.

When dining one evening, in the early years of the present century, with the Prince of Wales at Carlton House, after the wine had for some time circulated, the major's good-humoured volubility suddenly ceased, and he seemed lost in thought. The prince inquired the cause. "I have been reflecting, sir," replied George Hanger, "on the lofty independence of my present situation. I have compounded with my creditors, paid my washerwoman, and have three-and-sixpence left for the pleasures and necessities of life," exhibiting at the same moment the amount in current coin upon the royal board at which he sat. In July, 1806, he was promoted to the rank of colonel, retiring two years afterwards on full pay. The prince happening to meet him one day after he had obtained his colonelcy condescendingly remarked that "now he was rich again, he would so far impose upon his hospitality as to dine with him," at the same time intimating that the repast should not be extravagant. "I shall give your Highness a leg of mutton and nothing more, by G——," warmly replied the colonel. The day was named. Long destitute of credit and resources, he counted upon the forestalment of the profits of his appointment to entertain "the first gentleman in England," but agents had flinty hearts and a long memory and would not advance. The day approached, and Hanger could boast of little more than the once vaunted half-crown and a shilling. The day arrived, and etiquette demanded that the proper officer should examine and report upon the nature of the expected entertainment, when the colonel was found with his aide-de-camp in active preparation for his royal visitor, his shirt sleeves tucked up, while he ardently basted the roasting leg of mutton, which shed its savoury exhalation upon a panful of potatoes; and there were tankards of foaming ale and bread, *à discrétion*. Although my hero's culinary skill was not doubted, and the prince had once enjoyed a simple steak dinner at Alderman Combe's brewery, yet on this occasion the feast was dispensed with, and due acknowledgments made for the evidences of his hospitality. The career of this "eccentric nobleman" was certainly a varied one, for we next find him figuring in the demonstrations of June, 1810, attending the imprisonment of Sir Francis Burdett, on which occasion, mounted on a white horse, carrying a large oak stick and

wearing a blue cockade, he led the van of the procession which escorted Burdett upon his release from the Tower. Immediately following him came Major Cartwright and several county gentlemen on horseback, four abreast, and after them a long column of the electors of Westminster.

In the autobiographical work already alluded to the colonel gives an amusing description of the scenes at a contested election for Westminster, in which he took an active part, and he points out the many qualities of familiarity and condescension which a gentleman must needs have possessed under the old system, now replaced by ballot, if he wished to be of any service to his party.

The catalogues of the British Museum Library show him to have been the author of several works, besides the unsavoury autobiography, which was really compiled in 1800-2 by William Coombe from the colonel's own papers and suggestions.

He published, in 1804, "*The Lives and Adventures and Sharping Tricks of Eminent Gamesters.*" He does not seem to have ever played very high himself, and records with disgust how, in the early years of this century, it was customary for a faro table to be set up in the house of most women of fashion, the hostess often receiving as tribute the large sum of fifty guineas in one night from the proprietor of the machine.

There was also at that time more deep play at the clubs than there ever has been before or since. The before-mentioned work was followed, in 1814, by "*Colonel Hanger to all Sportsmen, and particularly Farmers and Gamesters,*" being fifty years' practice in horses and dogs, which appeared with a coloured etching of himself, after a portrait by Reinagle.*

This is believed to be one of the few authentic portraits of him now extant, excepting, perhaps, the sketch which appears in his autobiography, and depicts the noble author hanging on a gallows, apparently at Tyburn, in allusion to his name. He also wrote several works dealing with military matters. In 1795 he brought out an octavo pamphlet, entitled, "*Military Reflections on the Attack and Defence of London,*" in which he ridiculed the idea that our shores would be safe from foreign invasion. Nine or ten years later we find him issuing another alarmist pamphlet,

* There is a caricature portrait of Hanger in a large cartoon by George Cruickshank, issued with the "*Scourge,*" 2nd November, 1812. There are also several others of him by Gillay.

entitled, "Reflections on the Menaced Invasion," and the means of protecting the capital, with a letter on the proposed fortifications round London, and a "Defence of the Volunteer System." Indeed, the Volunteer movement, at the commencement of the present century, had no more zealous and active advocate than Colonel Hanger. And it was with reference to this subject that in 1808 he published "A Letter to Lord Castlereagh," proving how 15,000 men, well disciplined, may be acquired in the short space of two months, and with instructions to Volunteers, to which is added a plan for the formation of a corps of consolidated marksmen.

It is astonishing to see how much of worldly wisdom, and of what the Americans call "cuteness," is to be found in George Hanger's autobiography. He was no respecter of persons, nor, indeed, I fear, of religion in any shape, but scattered up and down his two volumes are to be found many bits of wisdom, wit and pathos.

"Great characters," says he, "cannot always bear a strict examination ; they are like old china jars, beautiful and admired by the world in general for the workmanship with which they are adorned, but when you look into them they generally contain dirt, dust and cobwebs." He gives many useful hints as to the necessity of purging the theatres of vice, and the encouragement of street preaching (if the morals of the public were to be improved), mixed up with all sorts of droll suggestions as to the best way of putting down those very amusements in which he himself excelled, and those exhibitions of which he and the Earls of Barrymore were the especial patrons, such as the "cock-pit" and the "ring." Indeed, he still enjoys by tradition the fame of having once been a noted "bruiser," while he was one of the most constant and zealous patrons of the cockpit and of all those places where the noble art of self-defence was practically illustrated.

Like many other eccentric characters, he was somewhat given to absent-mindedness. He records how one morning, having dressed himself, buttoned on the knees of his breeches and put on his shoes, he was in the act of going out of the door when his servant reminded him that he had forgotten his stockings ; on another occasion he was purchasing some books in a shop which stood at the corner of Sackville Street, and the evening being

dark, took up a candle to look at some volumes near the door, which he opened, and walked with the lighted candle as far as York Gate before he perceived it was in his hand. It transpired that he had been all day deeply engaged in calculating the immense increase of revenue that would accrue to the State by levying a tax on the absentee landlords, not of Ireland, but of Scotland, and another on the superfluous luxuries of forks and spoons. He had actually drawn up and organized in proper form the documents to lay before the ministers, which fact many a sagacious and experienced politician will acknowledge to be a sufficient excuse for his absence of mind.

We read in the columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine* that the "colonel," though free in his manners, was never inclined to give intentional offence, and the peculiarity of them precluded all idea of resentment, and laughter, rather than anger, was the result of his most extravagant sallies. Though he spent so much of his time among low society and in not very choice amusements, we are told that he devoted a considerable portion of it to reading, and was generally provided with topics for the rational conversation of the day, even in the most convivial circles. His summary of his wide experience of life in every phase and in all grades, shows how he was accustomed to associate with men and women of every rank, in palaces and night-cellars, and it is probable that few persons besides himself had seen and could describe from personal experience at once the gilded *salons* of Carlton House and the lowest purlieu of St. Giles'-in-the-Fields.

"The difficulties and misfortunes I have experienced," he writes, "I am inclined to think, have not proceeded from those causes, but from happening to come into life at a period of the greatest extravagance and profusion. . . . I could not withstand the temptations of that age of extravagance, elegance and pleasure." And indeed he was not the only sufferer, for most of his companions, and many of ten times his opulence, were ruined. George Hanger was capable of serious exertions of friendship (not by pecuniary sacrifices, for of such his situation hardly ever admitted, but by persevering zeal) when he was likely to effect a beneficial purpose, nor was he ever wanting in courage or the spirit of enterprise. Such a man, with all his faults and failings, could not have been wholly bad; and therefore it does not surprise me to find that when false charges were

brought against his honour as a man and a soldier, that not only Mr. Tattersall, but even the Prince of Wales, came forward and stood his friend. His goodness of heart, too, is proved in the fact, recorded by himself, that he visited in his cell at Newgate more than one highwayman whom he thought too severely punished, and even on occasion rode behind the tail of the cart up Holborn Hill and along Oxford Street to Tyburn. From first to last it would seem as if constant misfortune and disappointment had conspired to work a change in his temper, and almost in his very nature. He had had expectations from the Duchess of St. Albans, a cousin and *protégée* of his father's, but he was baulked of these, being cut out of her will during his absence in America by a certain Mr. Roberts, who had managed to play his cards with greater skill. It must have been a cruel blow. His father had received her, an heiress, into his family, educated and protected her until her marriage with the Duke of St. Albans. She stood godmother to George, and had always lived in the strictest intimacy and friendship with the Coleraine family.

Can it be a matter of wonder to any one, that, however good he might have been by natural disposition, he was in the end soured and embittered and driven into irregular courses, and at last came to boast that "he cared not whether he was a nobleman or a gentleman, but one thing he knew, and that was, that he was *a dead shot*?" In the days of duelling such words as these meant a good deal. Holding such sentiments, it was fortunate for him that he did not meet the fate of Thomas Pitt, Lord Camelford, and fall a victim in an "affair of honour."

At last, after many sufferings and vicissitudes, a coronet became his by the death of his brother, at Gloucester Place, in the autumn of 1814.

At first he was quite as averse to assume the title of "Lord Coleraine" as Horace Walpole was to call himself Earl of Oxford. In fact, Colonel Hanger scarcely ever signed his name by his new designation, and made it a matter of offence to be addressed by it. Still it came opportunely, and he knew by experience its value, and henceforth he resolved to quietly enjoy his altered circumstances. He had had enough of fashion and proved all its allurements; most of his contemporaries were dead, and new generations were springing up around him. He

took a house near the Regent's Park, though usually occupying a small cottage in Norfolk, not caring to inhabit his old ancestral home of Driffield, in Gloucestershire, which, on his death passed to the Vansittarts, his sister's children.

According to the tell-tale peerage, Lord Coleraine* lived and died unmarried; at all events, no legal marriage stands scored against his name in the chronicles of the *Viri optimi meriti*, though he seems in his wild harum-scarum youth to have contracted a quasi-matrimonial union with one of the gipsy tribe, whom he met by chance in the southern suburbs of London, and whom he mentions in his autobiography as the lovely "Egyptia." "She had an enchanting voice, a pretty taste for music, and played charmingly on the dulcimer. Ah, by the light of the moon, how her strains have enchanted me; strictly in time and never out of tune!"

He married her according to the customs of her tribe, which probably involved the jumping over a broomstick, and introduced her to his brother-officers in the Guards.

"I thought her the Pamela of Norwood, the paragon of her race, the Hester of the eighteenth century. But alas! one day, on my return after a short absence, I found she had gone off with a travelling tinker of a neighbouring tribe, who wandered about the country mending pots and kettles." It is clear from all that I have said, that Lord Coleraine cared little or nothing about "blue blood" and "pedigree," and that he valued a man rather by his skill with his fists or his rapier than by his descent from the Plantagenets. Still, every now and then, something of ancestral pride peeps out, in spite of himself, in what he writes; for instance, he tells us that his father was "an honest M.P.," an independent old English character, in favour of king and constitution, and above a bribe, even in the days of Sir Robert Walpole!

His declining years seem to have been spent peacefully enough. Near his London house stood an old-fashioned posting inn,

* Since writing this, I find that C. E. G. mentions, in his exhaustive work on the Peerage of the United Kingdom, whether existing, dormant, or extinct, that prior to January, 1823, Lord Coleraine married at Wapping Mary Anne Katherine, daughter of —, who died in December, 1846, aged 70, and that her ladyship, by will, left all her property, save £20, to John Greenwood Hanger, Esq., and Mary his wife.

which he was fond of visiting ; and there, as the price of his sanction, and in acknowledgment of his rank, a large chair by the fireside was exclusively appropriated to the peer. It is also recorded that he would frequently borrow books from the Carlton House Library, strange to say, chiefly on theological subjects. He had not put himself in his Royal Master's way for years, but one morning presented himself before the librarian, and requested permission to use certain books out of the library.

The Prince of Wales, now king, was delighted to hear of his old friend's turn of mind, and gave his gracious permission for him to use the books, provided they were all safely returned, which they always were by Lord Coleraine's own groom, who attended regularly, bringing back the volumes carefully wrapped in a piece of fine cloth, and at the same time fetching others away.

So closes my hero's adventurous and chequered career, the end of which came unexpectedly enough, for it is recorded in the columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for the 31st March, 1824, how he died suddenly from a convulsive fit at his London residence.

They laid him, "the last of his line," to rest among his ancestors, in the old church of Driffild, beside the bones of that mother whom he says had always been to him "a most kind, affectionate and tender parent." It is almost seventy years ago, but the peasantry still entertain the stranger with stories of the daring, and the devilry, and the goodness, and the fascination which existed in George Hanger.

A Deed of Derring Do.

PROLOGUE.

WHEN Gwen Ireton was only twenty, and as restlessly full of life as happiness and the novelty of her Indian existence could make her, she insisted on learning everything useful that it was possible for a woman to master, in view of a recurring mutiny.

Every one, including her husband, admired, laughed at and indulged her, until by degrees she became known as the best shot, the best rider and, next to the signalling classes, which acknowledged no rivals, the best hand with the heliograph and flags for hundreds of miles round, whereat she was greatly rejoiced, and sighed for fresh fields to conquer. As there did not seem to be any within her reach for a time (tennis and badminton were as child's play to her vigorous youth), there was peace in Agabad, and she devoted herself to perfecting her already acquired accomplishments, for as many hours as she could find congenial aides-de-camp to assist her, and for the rest of her unoccupied time to the more strictly feminine pursuits of painting and music and what her friends called "fussing about" her pretty bungalow.

But her ambition only slumbered, and one day, when the first hot breaths of the desert wind began to shrivel the energies of the dwellers in the plains, and to warn those unlucky souls who could not flee to the mist and rain of the hills of the scorching in store for them, she hit upon an audacious idea, which she proceeded to carry out upon the spot.

Her husband was what is technically called a "keen soldier," one of those whose knife-like intellects sever the Gordian knots which puzzle the clumsiness of inferior brains.

Inasmuch as he did not shine in any way as an athlete his wife's opinion of his powers was not in a direct ratio with her affection for him.

It had been his knowledge and appreciation of such favourite

hobbies as books, music and painting which had captivated her in the first instance, then his sterling worth, and perhaps his not at all uncomely exterior, had had much to say to strengthening her liking and completing her conquest.

Still, she came of a sporting race, and could not help a distinct thrill of admiration for manly prowess and feats of strength and skill, though her brains were too well developed to allow of a blind feminine worship for such things.

But there is no doubt that she grew a little dissatisfied at times because Tom was not a popular runner or cricketer, a power at tennis, a valued forward or half-back at football, a prize winner at racquets, or a noted horseman or polo player.

"You see, dear, it pays best in the long run—to be popular," she said, nodding her wise and exceedingly pretty head sagely, "and you are too——"

Then she bethought herself that she did not want to hurt Tom's feelings, so broke off judiciously, and went out to see the cows and ponies fed from the verandah, and air her Hindustani, of which she was at that time unjustifiably proud.

The afternoon that she chose for announcing her new line of study was dark and close.

The trees rustled ominously, and the green parrots were unwontedly silent. Everything living betrayed a tendency towards shelter, and there was a coppery glare in the lowering sky—a sense of something impending.

Tom Ireton was lounging on the west verandah in a long chair, with cigarettes and the proof-sheets of a military article.

His disgusted labours were varied by an amused attention to his young wife's wild flights of wrathful vernacular, and the really clever shots which the much-worried gwallas and syces made as to her precise meaning, evinced by their diplomatic answers to most of her questions and statements.

At last he laughed outright, and as the animals had finished their evening meal, Mrs. Ireton came hastily into the verandah and faced her husband indignantly, fanning herself with her brown terai hat.

"Tom, why are you laughing? It is absurd of you. They always understand what I say to them."

"Do they? I hope they don't," Ireton said, wondering much

as to the effect on the fourth syce's evilly-disposed mind, indeed of its results on the stable at large, of the Mem-sahib's last injunction, which translated ran :

"Why don't you always take away my horse's food? It is my order."

To which the bewildered servitor had promptly responded, "*Geribpurwa*" (preserver of the poor), which was non-committal, though it might have been a respectful admission of her augmentation of his substance.

"Don't laugh, but tell me where I made mistakes."

Gwen could be very peremptory, but as she was more than ordinarily pretty and fascinating, it was not unpleasant.

Tom explained laboriously, with the aid of pencil and paper, translating his wife's late conversation, and interrupted by soft explosions of laughter, which culminated in the decided announcement :

"I intend to learn Hindustani—and tactics. The munshi can teach me the one, and you can coach me in the other. I want to master *Kriegspiel*, so get Mr. Loftus and Captain French to come up and play it properly, with maps and an umpire."

Ireton stared at her aghast. He knew quite enough of his wife by this time to realize that whatever she meant doing would be done, whether it was helping to break in a refractory waler or firing an Express which laid her on her back in a *kutchra* road, gazing indignantly at an eagle soaring placidly away into the "infinite blue."

"Look here, Gwen," he began a little feebly, "I don't mind most of the things you try—" ("and do," she interpolated with a bewitching glance)—"but when it comes to such manifest absurdities as tactics, I'm going to strike."

"No, you are not, because I made up my mind a week ago, or very nearly so, and I want to master as much tactics and military information generally as might be useful——"

"Oh, your mutiny again, Gwen. My dear child, you're a wonderful woman—you really can shoot straight and ride like a bird and you've lots of pluck—but if that old mutiny ever comes off, or you are in a tight corner, you'll very probably be so scared that everything you ever learnt would fly out of your head and you'd be as useless as most pretty women, or ugly ones either."

"I'm never '*generally*' anything, but always particularly something."

She got up, stumbling over her habit and waking the fox-terrier, who protested with much stretching and yawning, and then snuffing the air suspiciously made for the drawing-room promptly.

"You know you don't mean it, Tom, and I refuse to be drawn this time, so submit with a good grace, like a dear boy."

"Come on, then," Ireton said resignedly. "These infernal proofs are finished and I can afford to waste an hour. By Jove! there's a dust storm coming. Fly, darling! The '*Sag*' has twigg'd it already."

Then the brown choking cloud, heavy with its detestable burden, swept over the station. Doors and windows burst open and banged wildly in the rushing wind, before they could be finally secured, and a darkness and heat as of the nether regions came down on the stifled world; but Gwen, done out of her ride on a new pony, for which disappointment she was half consoled by Tom's amenable frame of mind, knelt in a great chair by the side of the table, littered with maps and military literature, in his tobacco-haunted "den," and, with her face propped in her hands, had her first lesson in the science for which her soul thirsted, by the light of a guttering candle.

"And, by Jove! you are more promising than some I have coached occasionally," Ireton said, gazing at her as she finished dressing for dinner later on, in a jubilant mood, revolving mentally that which she had succeeded in grasping the meaning of so far.

"Oh," she said disdainfully, "did you think I was as idiotic as Finch and Wylie?"—two luckless youths whose passage through the militia and Sandhurst she had often heard quoted as nothing short of phenomenal in its mystery, as to how they did it.

"Don't be beastly proud, Gwen, because I agree with Eccles—I 'ate pride."

He couldn't kiss her as the ayah was still present, so he contented himself with worshipping her at a distance as he sat astride a rotten mango-wood chair and tried not to smash it as he rested his arms on the rickety back, and watched his wife pinning on her flowers and sweeping backwards and forwards in her young lithe grace before her Psyche mirror, with only half

the amount of interest which she usually took in her handsome self, an interest which he reflected was after all guiltless of the taint of an unpleasant conceit.

It amused him mightily to watch her absorbed face and to realize that this exquisite fragile girl in her white laces, accentuating the beauty of her dark head and brilliant eyes, was thinking of anything so brutal as the business of wiping her fellow mortals off the face of the earth according to Cocker, which means "Clausewitz" and "Meckel."

AS TOLD BY GUFFOOR KHAN,

Afghan Orderly.

I, WHO was there and helped, know it to be true ; of a surety it was a thing beyond wonder, that a woman should have done this deed, but so it was, and this was the manner of its happening.

The Sahib, with many others, and the Mem-sahib and the troops, sojourned in the great fort at Pathankote, and I was of the household of the Sahib, so that when orders came for him to go to the hill fort, three days' march into the heart of the hills, I went with the Presence also. There had been a question between the Sahib and the Mem-sahib concerning the going of the Mem-sahib, and however it was decided I know not, but we started alone—Ireton Sahib, a havildar and twenty men, and a gun and mules and "drabis," to strengthen the small fort and leave a garrison in it.

"Why?" do you ask? Nay, I know not, but that the English make use of every vantage against the people from the north. "Against our own people," say you? It may be so, but what matters is, that Ireton Sahib did that which he was commanded, and we went.

The first march was a long one—the worst for men and horses—and when we reached the camp, behold, sitting in the door of a tent on the ground was a woman, the Mem-sahib's ayah, and within was the Mem-sahib.

Never was there astonishment like to the Sahib's, and, but that he loves to foolishness, anger also. I gathered that there was pleading, and his wrath was turned ; so that on the morrow we marched on with six more with us. The Mem-sahib's ayah was a good woman as ayahs go, and she used to say that of all

the Mem-log she had served this was the best, so that she was ready to go anywhere with her.

Of a surety, Ireton Mem-sahib was a wonder. She rode with the bravery of a man, and every night made practice with the Sahib's pistol, hitting every time at long range, and with the rifle likewise.

The English think not as we do of their women, and of a truth, if they breed such as the Mem-sahib, they are right to do them the service that they do.

She always went veiled in a brown veil when abroad, and her figure was like the Sirus crane, so slender ; her face, as I saw it sometimes, was of a loveliness that is high among the Mem-log, and the Sahib was as wax in her hands ; but then she was a pearl among women, and should bear stalwart sons in good time.

It was early morning when we reached the fort on the rocks above the valley, and the Mem-sahib rode in ahead of the troop, speaking much and excitedly to the Sahib, and the havildar said that they spoke of war and fighting and the places to put the guns in like case. There was nothing the Mem-sahib did not know. Yes, in the two years of her sojourn in Hindostan, she had learnt to speak Urdoo. It was Nawas Munshi who, with the Sahib, taught her the speech, and she spoke it exceedingly well—though at first it was not of a clearness that one could understand. You know the place, Jhanda Singh, a long valley and hills everywhere, in parts brown and bare as your hand, and a water-course coming down the hillside and crossing the valley twice ; the long way to the fort, a partly made Sahib's road, and the path of the wild goat up the face of the rock. The long road was torn down in places and to get up was not easy. The bursting of the rains had been heavy of late, and the land had suffered.

Inside, the fort was as all hill forts ; there was a tower, on which we mounted the gun that fires more swiftly than lightning, with this difference, that once some one had built an upper chamber and a terrace above the inner court ; and here the Mem-sahib and her ayah lived ; for the Mem-sahib had her own camp and servants—the ayah and her syces and mehter, and the coolies for her tent.

There was much to be done of work at repairing the fort and

its well; and after that, all day long, the Sahib was with his men in the hills at work upon the roads, and the Mem-sahib sat upon the terrace or the roof making pictures, while I remained on guard, or not seldom she rode with the Sahib when she could. In the evening they made music, singing together after the manner of the English, which is strange to our ears; and once the Mem-sahib asked for a tumasha with the torches, and the men dancing, while she sat on the roof and watched, saying, "Shabash," when one more than the rest pleased her by great skill. She was fair to see, and a fit mother of warriors, as you will hear.

Every day we went to a rock beyond the fort and made talk with the sun signal to the great fort, and by-and-by came the General Sahib's hookum to the garrison in the Chota Kalla Killa to go back again to the Burra Lal Killah. The roads were finished, as much as could be done, and Ireton Sahib went on the last day to make an inspection with half the men, and to arrange for supplies with a village which would be true to the English salt, so said the head man who sent messengers to the Sahib begging his presence.

It was dawn when they marched out, as it was ten coss away in the hills and hard going.

The Mem-sahib came out to see them start, and stayed on the terrace until they had vanished in the mists. When she first saw what was coming on us I know not, but after the chota hazri she would not sleep, and she walked about with the Sahib's glasses, that see men as ants afar off and bring them near, looking all round the valley.

The havildar was shaking with the fever, that is worse in the drying up of the rains, and lay on his bed in a shaded place, and by mid-day the word came that he was very sick, and the Mem-sahib was greatly troubled and sent him much white powder to kill the fever; but it sufficed not, and the ayah said she began to weary for the coming of the Sahib.

The great heat of the day died when the sun went down, and in the cool the Mem-sahib called to me:

"Oh! Guffoor Khan! there is a man in the water-course below. See if he is one of ours."

I left my hubble bubble and went and saw with the wonder-working glass, and the man was strange.

Now the road for the village folk was to the north at the back of the fort, and the water-course was away from the road a whole coss, and not an easy path, for there was still much water, but the nullah was deep and would hide many men, and something told me that the man was the portent of evil. He was between us and the rough path by which the Sahib would return, crossing the water-course once—for he came not back as he went.

When I said, "The man is not of ours if the Presence pleases," the Mem-sahib thought for a little; then she said—and I marvelled:

"Send Hira Singh, who is quick like a squirrel, and can hide like a lizard, and see what the man wants and if there be more in the nullah."

So Hira Singh, stripped of his clothes to his "langooti," went like a thief in the night, for it was a wonder to see him go, indeed one could not see him.

I can understand somewhat of the English tongue, and I heard the Mem-sahib say to this effect:

"If it is mischief and Tom not here, and the havildar sick of the fever!" and her voice sounded like that of a frightened woman, but when she spoke again in my own tongue it was like the clash of a steel lock.

"Fall in, bajao!* and close the gates; I think I see more men, and the light on something like rifles."

I went as if it had been the sahib's hookum, and in a moment the call sounded and the men were out and ready.

Hearing the sound of arms, the voice of the havildar cried out to us:

"Ohé! has the Presence returned? What means the noise?"

Then the Mem-sahib went to the door of the havildar's room and spoke in the English tongue; he being an old man and serving the English since he was young like a lusty buck, their speech was plain to him.

Then heard I the havildar groan and say, speaking weakly in our speech:

"May the Presence appear quickly. I will come and do that

* "Bajao" = "Sound" the "fall in."

which is my duty. The Mem-sahib has the heart of many men."

And he would have come out to the door, but the Mem-sahib cried out—he had fallen :

"See to him, Guffoor Khan." Then I heard the Mem-sahib giving orders even as would the Sahib have done, and the men went to their places, while I held up the head of the havildar, who said :

"Carry me out where I can see and speak to my children."

I carried him with the help of Hira Singh, who had slipped into the fort as a snake wriggles through a wall.

"It is true; and there be many men in the nullah, all armed and coming silently, and we are few and have two women to protect."

The havildar, lying on his charpoy, listened and spoke :

"The Mem-sahib for idleness learnt the work of men and knows much, and her heart is great, hear you, and obey when she speaks, for my voice carries scarce beyond this bed, and this will be no children's play. I know now that the Sahib has been evilly lured away, and this is the work of the Moollah of Bostan, who will take the Mem-sahib and the woman away, and kill all who serve the English."

While he spoke came a thin light of the thickness of a finger across our faces. The figure of the Mem-sahib was dark on the gun tower to our left, and in her hands was a lantern with which the Sahib made talk always at night, and she was making it speak to the great fort.

Presently through the darkness we heard her say in English :

"They have seen," and the lantern clicked swiftly in her hands until the talking was done, and Hira Singh said in a whisper :

"Then the relief comes in the morning of the third day if they start to-night."

After awhile the havildar sent me on to the gun-tower to tell the Mem-sahib that there was no man left who could work the "gun with many mouths," for the manner of feeding it was not known, and it would have meant the lives of many who would slay us and take the women captive.

But the Mem-sahib said—nowise afraid to outward seeming :

"I know the way of it, and when the time comes I will undertake it."

And every man at his post at the walls and gate, and the ayah and the bearer crouched by the havildar, the drabis by the mule shed ; and the Mem-sahib on the gun-tower with Hira Singh and myself waited in the darkness, listening as the deer listen in the forest when the grass stirs and the leaves sway before the tread of the tiger.

Once the Mem-sahib went down softly like a shadow, and as she came back I saw round her waist a belt in which were pistols, and I remembered the Sahib had had it made in likeness of his own and laughed as she buckled it on, and it was I who had brought it from the place where it was made, so I knew it well. It is like an animal breathing when the world is still under the stars and there is no sound of men ; we waiting dared not to breathe, only listened. Hira Singh touched me, and we saw shadows amongst the shadows, and once something clicked.

The Mem-sahib had seen, and I saw her put her hand on the thing that made the many-mouthed speak. She gave the hookum to Hira Singh, and he slipped down and disappeared, and the distant shadows likewise.

Presently he came back again and told the Mem-sahib that there were men on all three sides, hidden among the rocks, and the distance was scarcely from here on the parapet to the centre of the big parade ground yonder. The Mem-sahib nodded, and I heard the leather of her belt squeaking like the cry of a mouse. So she was not indifferent, but she was quiet.

"Tell the havildar and see what he says." The Mem-sahib's hookum was not that of one afraid, but ready.

"Wait." Hira Singh brought back the answer and crouched on his hams again behind the gun with his rifle across his knees.

Then the Mem-sahib, after waiting as long as it takes the light to fade between the going down of the sun and the dark, left me on guard on the tower and, taking Hira Singh, went round the fort, and I heard afterwards how wisely she questioned and gave orders, and how the men were ready to obey to the death if need be, and it seemed as near as one could cast a stone then and for many hours after that. In her rounds she spoke to the havildar and he did not answer clearly, for the life was low

in him, and by-and-by it went out altogether, but we did not know it then, not until an hour after he had died.

Then the Presence came back to the tower and the waiting began again, and the stars paled before the coming of the moon.

When the light was strong enough to see ten paces of a man away it shone on steel, and as the moon rose into the sky the steel showed low down and straight towards us and close together. Then the voice of the Mem-sahib, quicker than I can tell of it, called loudly: "Fire!" and we obeyed; Hira Singh and I firing through the tower on each side of the many-mouthed, that spoke with a roar, and ceased not until it had sent fifty shots to find the cowards fighting ten to one against twelve men—and one sick—and a woman.

The crash of the bullets and slugs on the metal of the gun-screen was hard to bear for a woman's delicate ears, but the Mem-sahib flinched not. I heard after that the hookum of the Mem-sahib had been to fire along the line of light that betrayed their rifles, which spoke after one with an uncertain sound as of men taken unawares. But they found one man within the fort and it went hard with him, but he did not die.

Whether we had taken lives or how many we could not tell then, but we heard the sound of feet amongst the stones, and the moon showed no more moving shadows or broken lights that night.

Then Hira Singh after an hour's peace was sent out again, as he prayed to go, and came back after awhile saying the nullah was still swarming with men, and that the nearer ground was clear.

He had lain face down on a rock overhanging the water-course and heard them swear to gut the fort when the dawn came and take the white woman alive, but he told not this latter lest the Mem-sahib's heart should turn to water; only to me.

There were wounded, too, and he thought to the number of ten; also he saw that where they had lain under the cover of the darkness was more open than we thought, and the many-mouthed had swept the ground like rain.

The Mem-sahib said little, and in the moonlight her face was very white, but the eyes, which do not lie if there is fear, were like the Sahib's when he is strong of will.

The bearer and ayah were watching the man whose arm and shoulder had been torn by a slug ; the Mem-sahib had bandaged it with a piece of puggri, washing and closing the wound, and had gone back to the gun. Later we told her that the havildar had followed the call of death, when she asked for him, and I could see she sorrowed thereat. Then we waited for the dawn, knowing what would happen when it came. The Mem-sahib had black coffee brought to her once, and twice she went round the fort and the bhisti took water to the men.

With the fading of the moon and in the brief space of darkness before the dawn, we heard sounds as of the enemy closing in again, and when the full light came, though they were skilfully hidden, yet here and there were signs.

There was abundance of ammunition, but we were few, and there was no time for food or sleep, and as two more men fell when they opened fire in the fourth watch of the night, though one went back later with only a cut from a splinter of wood, still our hearts were not light, and the Mem-sahib's face was whiter, and her eyes larger and darker than those of a deer, but steadfast.

A heavy piece of stone falling from the tower had bruised her shoulder likewise.

"If they rush to the gate every one must be ready," she said once.

The bearer, a Mussulman, and an old servant of the Presence, took the rifle of the one dead and his belts, and left the havildar and the other side by side in the room, on the ground. The gate had been strengthened with everything that could be piled and bound against it, and the spare stones collected inside the fort had been built up against the charpoys and chairs and tables. The Mem-sahib ordered and it was done, in the second night after the first day, after much fighting in the afternoon, when they tried to reach the gate. The heat was cruel for the Mem-sahib, and the bhisti brought water many times, while the ayah threw it on her head, and plaited up her long hair, which hung beyond her waist.

But though we were falling with sleep and thirsty and hungry, for the food was scanty and failing, for very shame we looked like lions before the white woman who never knew fear, or if she felt it in her heart, did not show it, though we knew that her

sorrow for the Sahib was like unto death. It was the same all through the second night and day, only the many-mouthed, worked by the Mem-sahib's hands, screamed through the heat and the cold watches of the night and kept the enemy at bay; and Hira Singh did excellent service, slipping out by ways that only he or a snake could wriggle through to tell where they would place their men, so that the Mem-sahib might turn the many-mouthed on its platform to sweep them away. Messages had come from the great fort to cheer us, but men have not the wings of birds, and those who had gone to us came but slowly to our need, and the Mem-sahib was growing to look very strange.

On the morning of the third day, with the daylight, a light came into her face that was other than the day. Since I was the next to the havildar, who had been buried with the other in the ground of the fort, she spoke to me:

"Is it wisdom, oh! Guffoor Khan, we will not reply to their firing, neither ye nor I, and they will then come out to take us by climbing over the walls, and we can, when they stand up, kill them easily."

It was terrible to hear a woman, white, and slender as the reeds of the river, one who had gone softly all her days, speak thus; but it was good talk, and they had slain the Sahib and many good men with him, so we let them fire, spitting shots all through the long hours of the morning and noon against the silent walls of the fort, which seemed to sleep.

They were devils though for cunning, and they came not soon as the Mem-sahib thought, and Hira Singh, whose father must verily have been a Djinn, for he heard them talking even in the daylight as he went like a lizard among the stones, reported that they had lost many men, but were still more than seventy, and they talked angrily amongst themselves, saying there was magic in the white woman and her gun, for they knew by this time that the Mem-sahib was mightiest by reason of her courage and the gun, which obeyed only her.

Coming back the last time Hira Singh was seen and wounded, but he got round to the steep face of the cliff, where only the wild goats went, and hung outside the walls, and we sent a rope down to him and brought him up.

"They will come within an hour if they come at all," he said,

and fainted, for his blood was dropping like water from a hole in his chest.

They said it was a piece of broken iron that had struck him ; and they came, but we were ready ; we had masked the loopholes and the gun-tower, and the gate was firm with its wooden posts and the things and stone in a wall behind the gates, and we had each man the last seventy rounds of ammunition and the gun had 500 left.

The Mem-sahib had eaten a little, but not slept ; she stood by the gun, with the same white face and eyes like an animal hunted to the death ; once she said, looking at us all before we went to our places for the last time :

"You are brave men, and if you die I die too," and she touched the pistol in her belt, and we salaamed before her, and every man wondered not at the love the Sahib had had for her.

At an hour before sunset they came ; we could see them stealing out of the nullah and forming up on the open, cautiously at first, then in the silence quickly, until they stood before us full seventy men ; we had a round each for them, and the many-mouthed 500, so we had no fear at first, but that we were weak from little food and want of sleep, and our eyes were not clear.

As they came on over the broken ground they halted twice under cover, and listened, and we heard our hearts when the noise of their feet had ceased.

They had 400 yards to come, and they came stealthily until they were only 100 feet away from the fort, then they stopped again, and we heard them speaking, and we grinned like tigers in our lair.

At length they moved again with their rifles at the trail, and then, when their whole bodies were plainly visible, the Mem-sahib cried out so that we all heard the high thin woman's voice, "Fire !" and we obeyed.

The silence was great for a second after the shrieking of the many-mouthed amongst the rocks, and the spitting fire of our few rifles had ceased, then before they could form again came the cry, "Fire !" once more, and we obeyed.

It was hard fighting then, for we fired as fast as we could feed the rifles, and the many-mouthed never tired.

I helped the Mem-sahib at the last, for she was whiter and

weaker, but they never reached the gate; the leaden rain had made their lives as water, and they were fast going back to the nullah, only fifty men, for we could count those on the ground, and Hira Singh swore to the seventy in the nullah before they came out.

Then we shouted as well as our strength would let us, and they heard us: "Oh, Futteh Ji Ke Jail!" and we jeered them as cowards, and felt it in us to go out and fight them.

Then our cry choked in our throats as they turned and came on again; but staggering as we stood with heat and fatigue and sleep, we heard a sound that was not ours, a strange long shriek, and a sharp crashing sound, and the striking of heavy bodies on the rocks around; following came the dull report of another distant gun, not that which obeyed the Mem-sahib, and mingled with the firing and the howls of wounded and angry men was a sharp cry from the Mem-sahib; our hearts shook within us, for she was our tower of strength, but it was joy, not fear, and she cried out in our speech with a great cry, "The men from the great fort are below in the valley. Fire!"

Then we obeyed for the last time, and the terrible screaming of the many-mouthed tore the air and seemed to break the rocks, and her breath was deadly, and other four men fell before her. But the end was now, and not too soon, for we lost two also, and one man came over the wall in a weak place and was shot down, showing what must have happened had not the relief come.

There was some further fighting up the hill and in the nullah, and it was dark before the peace of victory sent us to undo the gates, to let the Sahibs and the relief from the great fort enter. We were seven men and the Mem-sahib, and the ayah and bearer, and the bhistics and the drabis, standing in the glare of the torches to receive them, when the General Sahib and three other Sahibs rode in at the gate; and lo! and behold, one was Ireton Sahib. Behind him were some of the men who had gone out with him. The General Sahib said something in English, and, stooping, kissed the hand of the Mem-sahib, but she, seeing only Ireton Sahib, would have spoken, but fell instead, as Hira Singh had fallen, and lay with all of us men and the Sahibs standing round her in wonder that this should happen, for she had had the heart of many men, as the havildar had said, and she should bear

mighty sons. And this is true talk of what happened in the fort of Chota Kalla Killa, as I know it.

EPILOGUE.

"If you ever break loose and disobey me again, Gwen, I will lock you up for life, and only take you out on a chain. Gwen! My God! what I suffered thinking of you. I can't speak of it."

"Don't try to," she said with a ghost of her old manner, as she lay in her hammock, letting her fingers wander weakly over Ireton's as they clasped the arm nearest to him. "Anyhow, I didn't store up knowledge uselessly, and you didn't waste your time after all, Tom."

"Gwen! Gwen! I don't know whether to worship you or be furious with you, darling. I wish I could blot out the horror, and only remember your pluck."

"When in doubt play trumps, making worship trumps."

She was evidently struggling with something that induced her to be flippant, and made her eyes misty and her lips tremulous. Then she lay still for a few moments looking at vacancy in a preoccupied fashion that somehow made Ireton feel nervous.

Pencils of palpitating light drew through the heavy broken chicks hot lines across the great room, whitewashed and chunamed to a painful cleanliness and lustre, and very bare in spite of Gwen's attempts to turn it into a drawing-room, with native silks as hangings and a bizarre assortment of rough pottery and brass as ornaments. The Mexican hammock in stained grass cord was a pretty and unusual spot of brilliant colour hanging in the broken lights and shadows, and Gwen, sunk in her yellow silk cushions, in her white tea-gown, looked very wan amid so much that was bright of hue. It was curious how the oval face had sharpened and the eyes had sunk, almost more than one would have expected that they would, and Ireton felt uneasy; her great quietude seemed almost unnatural, well as he knew her evenly-balanced nature and her powers of self-control. Suddenly she turned to him, nearly upsetting the hammock.

"Tom! One thing! Comfort me! Hira Singh found out that they meant to have come in any case, so it was not my being there that brought them."

Her eyes were very brilliant, and her white face flushed across the cheek-bones in ominous spots.

"Gwen, you were to blame for nothing but such madcap disobedience as coming after me, and I'll forgive it, dear, for the sake of your courage if you won't do it again. Promise?"

"Yes," she said slowly, her eyes wandering round the room, "but I——Guffoor Khan!"—in a shrill whisper—"we won't fire yet."

Her eyes were steady now, but piteous in their strained expression.

"Wait until they come out into the open; now the havildar is dead the responsibility rests on me, and I must remember all Tom taught me—if only I don't fall asleep. Hira Singh, go out and see if they are coming; see if the water has failed. Quick! if thou canst climb up the cliff may not another man? And they will come in that way, and I haven't enough men to properly line——Guffoor Khan, tell the ayah not to cry; she makes my head ache, and she must be as brave as the men, and I want her to wet my hair and braid it. I daren't go down, the breeze on the tower keeps me awake, and it smells of death below. Two men buried—two wounded—Tom must be dead. Oh, God! no! Keep my head clear; don't let me think of that. Tom! Finch or Wylie would have muffed this, wouldn't they?—or didn't you say they might be first-class in a row?"

"Tom! whisper, darling, if you hadn't chaffed me so, I should be afraid, but I *will* hold out till the relief comes. I signalled, only I couldn't remember the right code, but they sent back, 'All right; understand.' I sent, 'Tom's not come back; some one coming to fight us.'"

"Ayah! take care of the havildar's gold beads; the bearer said he sent them to me when he died. Oh! that terrible splitting noise, and the bullets on the metal screen, and soon I must fire it again, but I want to kill men, because they have killed—— No, no! Not that, not that! Fire! Bring me coffee quickly, or I shall fall asleep."

"Tom, I hoped one day we should have a son, and now—— Oh, God! help me to keep my head. Hira Singh is hurt now, badly hurt. Five men, only seven left. Oh, Tom! No, Guffoor Khan comes! There are men from the Burra Lal Koti in the valley. Fire! Oh, there are the screw guns! Tom! Tom! not dead, and we saved the fort! Was it my fault that they came, because I would come with you? Tom, was it my fault?"

Then the days and nights were a longer torture almost than those in the village of the Moollah of Bostan, for Ireton realized again his own agony, and that of the girl who was fighting the second time for the life so dear to him, dearer now than ever, as they gathered from her ravings what she had suffered, that Guffoor Khan had never known, though he knew so much.

But death was merciful, and left at last the figure round which he had hovered for so long, lying weak and white on its Chinese mat, but delivered from the clutches of his servant fever; and Ireton, when the word went forth that she was saved, broke out into helpless laughter, hiding his head on his folded arms and shaking from head to foot.

Gwen lived, and when she came out again for the first time into the sunlight, nearly her old radiant self, Guffoor Khan and Hira Singh and the men who had lived through those three long days and nights under the Mem-sahib's hookum, and had fought with and for her, were drawn up in front of the General's quarters to be reviewed by her, that they might receive their medals from her hand.

Stiff and impassive, as only Sikhs can be, like statues of bronze, their keen faces softened as the fragile white woman came out into the square and spoke to them in their own tongue, telling them what she felt, that they had been brave and obedient and that she would never forget them, and that she would always wear the havildar's beads (she touched the small gold string on her wrist) in memory of the bravest men she had ever known. Then she pinned on their medals, calling them all by name, and never were salaams so heartfelt as those which greeted her then. As she turned to go back to the quarters, a great shout, the old Sikh cry, "*Futteh Ji Ke Jai*," made her pale with excitement and emotion, for it was taken up, and the whole garrison of the fort cheered her madly.

It should have been done with more pomp and ceremony, but she turned to the General imploringly, begging him to take her away, and hastily he said, uncovering :

"Will you not wait one moment longer, Mrs. Ireton? the men must see you decorated too, as you won your cross with them."

She stood in silence, flushing and paling, biting her under lip, to keep back the tears, while the general, turning to the troops, said, in the vernacular and in English :

"Men, this Red Cross was sent by the Queen-Empress, whom we all serve, as a reward for valour in the field, to Ireton Mem-sahib, and you know how well and nobly she deserves it."

Then, with a low salute, the white-haired soldier fastened the Royal Red Cross among the laces on her breast, and stepped back, holding up his helmet. Such a shout it was that rose then, it startled the green parrots from peaceable conversation and the blinking owls from their sleep for a mile round. The parrots screamed in chorus, flashing backwards and forwards like emerald lightning, and the owls turned out in brown bunches, and sat on trees and walls and under eaves, and swore under their breaths, for they were too sleepy to do themselves justice.

Gwen Ireton, usually so self-possessed, now pale and half hysterical with late weakness and the shock of pleasure, the cross held tightly in one hand and the other shading her eyes, fled through the verandah into their quarters, while the cheers rang out again and again for her deed of Derring Do.

MARY E. MAUDE.

My Cousin Dan.

IT is a strange tale I have to tell, and a painful one. I can look back to it now with only the dim reflection of the pain and horror it once caused me. We grow callous as we lose our youth, and to my mind, though it spares us much sorrow, that callousness is not the least painful part of the hard labour called growing old that is nature's sentence on all of us who escape for a time the extreme penalty of her law.

"What nonsense! *You* will never grow old at heart or callous," says my wife, leaning her soft round cheek against mine. And then the old shadow falls over her face, and I see that twenty years have not taught her to forget.

Dan Crossfield was my cousin, and from our earliest boyhood we were friends and companions. He always was cursed with a gloomy nature and an ungovernable temper. He was extraordinarily gifted, possessing a perfect mental digestion and a capacity for assimilating knowledge without expending either time or trouble on it, which filled a plodder like myself with wonder and admiration. He was full of the strangest contradictions; sometimes he appeared to possess every noble and generous quality—and yet at other times he would descend to pettinesses that I should have thought utterly beneath him. He kept me in a constant state of turmoil and bewilderment of mind: at one moment I admired and looked up to Dan, at another I found myself reluctantly obliged to despise him. I soon learnt to pity him. It was when we were lads of sixteen and eighteen that I first gained an insight into the dark and gloomy prison-house of my cousin's mind. We had been at Westminster School for some years—we were Queen's scholars, and, of course, we were proud of it. Dan was two years my senior, and what sentimental ladies were apt to call "a beautiful youth!" There was something almost seraphic about his large blue eyes and golden curls—but that something went no further; an aggrieved Westminster master once said of

him: "No deed is too daring, no word too audacious for that handsome young devil!" and the master was right. Dan's delinquencies were many, but they were executed with such caution and carried through with such consummate skill that though others sometimes suffered, he never did, although always suspected of being prime mover in every act of revolt, and disliked accordingly by the masters. Dan was extremely proud of his hands, which were as white and smooth and delicate-fingered as a woman's, and the idea of being "handed," as we called the sharp strokes of the birch administered for punishment, was peculiarly odious to him; hence, perhaps, his skill in escaping it.

One evening after we went up to bed Dan and I indulged in a pipe—it was not the first time we had done so by any means, but as smoking was a crime, prohibited by the strictest rules and peculiarly repugnant to the master whose study was at the foot of our stairs, we conducted operations with great caution. We went into the broad corridor which ran outside our rooms and took our stand under an open skylight, which conveyed the smoke safely away.

"How savage old Jones would be if he could see us!" said Dan, chuckling; "wouldn't he be glad if he could catch me at it!" As he spoke, one of the juniors came swaggering up, cigar in mouth, and with all the recklessness and conceit of youth went half way down the stairs, sending clouds of smoke in the direction of the master's study.

"Stow that, you brat!" exclaimed Dan, but it was too late; Jones had as keen a nose for tobacco as ever old Mathew Hopkins for a witch, and though we got safely back to our rooms his voice pursued us.

"So you are smoking, young men; I shall expect you to send in your names to-morrow." It was a point of honour with us at Westminster when any general accusation of smoking was made for all those concerned to send in their names to the master; accordingly little Bascomb, the youngster who had caused all the mischief, and I myself complied with this immemorial custom, and were publicly "handed" the next day. Jones gave me some particularly severe cuts, saying, as he bestowed the last one, which stung more than a little and drew an unpleasant amount of blood:

"I have no moral doubt, Holgate, that your cousin was smoking with you last night, but I see he hasn't had the pluck to send up his name."

His words stung me more than the handing ; it seemed impossible that Dan could have been so mean, and yet there he was, sitting calmly among the other seniors, his seraphic face wearing a calm and pious look as of one unconscious and incapable of ever having smoked an illicit cigar.

It was plain enough ; Dan had *not* sent in his name, and, to my boyish mind, he could hardly have disgraced himself more if he had committed a forgery or a murder. I had often wondered at Dan's conduct, often involuntarily despised him for his facile way of slipping out of scrapes and leaving others in, but there had never been anything quite so bad as this ; it shook all the faith in my cousin that I had still retained ; it taught me the first bitter lesson we are bound to learn when we set any human being on too high a pedestal. Dan came up to me after dinner in hall and laid his arm round my shoulders in his old caressing way, but I shook it off and turned sullenly from him. He followed me.

"So you are sorry I haven't a bleeding hand as well as you, old fellow," he said, looking at my ill-treated member.

"I am sorry you haven't a sense of honour," I retorted. He did not answer, but something in his face made me sorry for him. I saw for the first time that he was very pale, and that there was a look of pain in his great blue eyes.

"Look here, Dan," I began, laying my hand on his arm, "I didn't mean to hurt you, but ——" He shook himself free and walked away in silence.

An hour or two later I went up to my room, and, to my surprise, I hadn't been there a moment before Dan came in.

"Lend me your whip, old fellow," he said. I gave it him ; it was a slender switch I had lately bought for my sister.

"What's the row ?" I asked, as he took it. He was flushed, and his eyes flashed savagely. "I am going to give a beast a lesson," he answered shortly.

And then he began to lash his hand with sharp furious strokes, muttering to himself between the cuts.

"There, you cur ! You mean hound ! You dishonourable mongrel ! This will teach you to sneak and lie ! This will teach you to be a coward again !"

"Dan!" I cried; "Dan, drop it! You are going mad!" and I tried to get the whip from him. But it was no good—he was as strong as a horse. At last, after nearly a dozen cuts, he flung the whip away; but his fury had been so great that every slash had cut through the skin and drawn a stream of blood.

He looked down at his disfigured hand with a curious smile.

"I shall never be proud of it again," he said.

I stood by him in silence. I was horrified and utterly unable to understand him.

Dan threw himself into a chair, and began to bind up his hand with strips torn off his handkerchief. Presently he looked up at me, and I could see there were tears in his eyes.

"Of course, you despise me, Tom," he said with a break in his voice that made me, with my inborn insular horror of emotion, extremely uncomfortable; "but can't you imagine that I despise myself more utterly than any one else can? I know my self—it is a vile self—and I hate it. I should like to tear it piecemeal, limb from limb. I hate my self, I tell you, and yet I must always live with it. Think of that, Tom; how would *you* like to spend your life with a creature that you hate? Most men can avoid their enemy, but I—*my* enemy is *here*." He struck his breast savagely, then buried his face in his hands with a groan. It was nearly an hour before he looked up again; the old softness had come back to his eyes.

"You don't understand, do you, Tom?" he said gently; "you are too young. Yes, of course, I'm young too—in years, but in nothing else. I have never been young; I was born old, and ever since I was a baby I have wondered why I was born at all. Any way, I am not too young to wish I were dead, and free from my cursed self."

Poor Dan! I pitied him. I was almost too boyishly ignorant then to know exactly why I pitied him, but as time went on and I remembered my cousin's strange words, I realized how truly miserable a being he must be.

And yet, if love and admiration could make a man happy, Dan should have been that man. He possessed a peculiar fascination even for men, and as for women, his handsome face and charming manner played perfect havoc with their hearts. I myself, although I knew more of my cousin's inner man than any one in the world, and had no reason to admire what I knew,

was not proof against his fascinations. I would have done anything for him, and considered myself honoured by his friendship.

* * * *

It was eight years after that painful incident at Westminster that Annie Lover, the woman who was destined to play so large a part on our small stage, first came into my life. I met her at a tennis party during a stay with some friends in Warwickshire. I had striven hard to avoid that tennis party, having had a painful experience of the deadly and unmitigated dulness of that class of entertainment, but I had striven in vain. I was a *man*, and men are scarce in Leamington, so I was dragged at my hostess's chariot wheels, a most unwilling victim. But I had my reward, for I was introduced to Annie Lover. As she raised her eyes and smiled at me, murmuring at the same time one of those inane remarks on the weather which are considered necessary for the starting of a conversation (at a tennis party), the day, the scene, the extremely bad play going on before us, and the excessively commonplace people around became transfigured and glorified. Of course I knew what it meant—I had fallen in love. I instinctively recognized the wand of that fairy godmother whose light touch can create a new heaven and a new earth. I don't know if Annie Lover was beautiful—I don't know to this day; but I thought her so. "My love Annie's wondrous bonny" was the line that came into my head as I met her dancing eyes and watched the healthy red mantle in her rounded cheeks. Bonny she was, and running over with life and spirits. I saw a good deal of Annie after our meeting at the tennis party, and before I left Leamington she had promised to be my wife.

Annie told me frankly that the love she felt for me was not what she had dreamed of in girlish day-dreams, but this admission became less unpalatable when she added sweetly that no doubt I could soon teach her to love me as I deserved.

A few months after I left Leamington Annie came to stay with my mother at our home in Hampshire. That was one of the happiest times of my life; Annie and I were always together, and I found her quite an apt pupil at the old, old lesson I had set myself to teach her. And then, as ill luck would have it, Dan invited himself down to stay with us.

I ought to have refused his request, but I had not the moral

courage. He wrote that he was ill, overworked, sick of life and London. Some of the influence he exerted over me clung even to his letter. Dan came, and from that moment my happiness was at an end.

In a very little while I could see that Annie had learnt to love him as she had never loved me. I could see it in the very tenderness of her manner to me; it was the tenderness of pity and conscious wrong. I did not blame her, for I knew how irresistible Dan was when he chose to exert the full powers of his strong magnetic personality.

And he exerted it to the uttermost; he strained every nerve to win Annie's heart. He loved her, and I knew him well enough to know that for the moment every thought of honour or conscience was carried away by the flood of passion.

One day, as I took a disconsolate and misanthropic prowling round the garden, I came unexpectedly upon Annie. She started when she saw me, and tried to conceal a letter she had been reading.

"Don't trouble to hide it," I said. "I can guess its contents. Give it me."

She obeyed in silence, and watched me with agonized eyes while I read. It was a wild effusion from Dan, imploring her to recall her fatal decision, and give up a man who would never make her happy. He urged her to consent to a secret marriage with him at once, and talked more high-flown and sentimental rubbish about endless devotion and deathless love than he would have been able to disprove by his acts in a week. I gave her back the letter in silence; I could not trust myself to speak just then. I could see in her miserable face, as she gazed at me, the reflection of my own. I couldn't bear to see her so unhappy.

"Don't look so wretched, Annie," I said gently; "I am not angry with you. Everybody loves Dan."

"But I would have married you, Tom," she faltered; "I would—I would, indeed."

"Then you would have been very foolish. I am sorry you contemplated doing me such a wrong. You are free, Annie; I hope you will be happy."

Anything more cordial I could not force myself to say. She caught my hand in both hers and kissed it passionately.

"God bless you, Tom," she said. "And—and will you promise me one thing?"

"What is it?"

"Don't be *very* angry with poor Dan—for—for my sake promise to forgive him."

I gave the required promise. It was easy enough to forgive Dan now—the mischief was done—anger or bitterness were of no avail. Dan had won the prize, as he had won every prize through life. I felt too utterly broken and dreary to be capable of hatred. My life was absolutely valueless to me. I left Hampshire that day, resumed my solitary life in my dreary London diggings and devoted myself to literary work. I was tolerably successful in it; disappointed love and a feeling of intolerable injury gave just that cynicism and flippancy to my writings, so desirable in magazine articles, which had been wanting in my previous efforts. I manufactured stories full of fast society ladies and disreputable noblemen; I knew nothing of either of these types, but I abused them heartily, and the public seemed to like it. I produced pages of cheap cynicism and sentiment that I considered dear at any price, but my stories found a ready sale, and it was not very long before I became quite a popular magazine writer. This was a stroke of luck, but the loss of Annie had taken the bloom off what had once been a coveted plum. Two years had passed since my last interview with Annie; she had been married to Dan now more than nineteen months, and I had seen or heard nothing of them since. It was November, and I was sitting over the fire in my dingy little room, smoking a meditative pipe and musing over the hollowness of life. Life is apt to appear particularly hollow on a raw November evening, when the damp outer fog filters into your room through every crack and crevice and the fire exhibits a persistent tendency to go out. The horrible fog grew thicker and thicker, it crept down my throat and choked me; it got into my brain and into my heart. If I had been a woman I should have indulged in the mysterious luxury they call a "good cry"—as I was only an inferior creature I stuck to my pipe and swore under my breath.

I heard a heavy step on the landing outside, then the door opened, and a familiar figure loomed mistily through the fog into the clearer circle of the gaslight.

"Dan!"

"Yes, it's me, old man. Glad to see you, Tom," and before I quite realized it I was shaking his hand heartily and feeling most unmistakably cheered by his presence. My thoughts went back to the dear old Westminster days when we were boys together; the sight of Dan brought back all my old affection for him. He coaxed my fire into a more cheerful blaze, drew a comfortable chair opposite mine, took a pipe from his pocket—the very pipe he had smoked at Westminster—lighted it, and then puffed away for some moments in solemn silence.

"I see you've forgiven me, Tom," he said at last.

I nodded.

"You always were a good-hearted, sensible fellow, and no more capable of bearing malice than my great Newfoundland dog Bruno."

"Thank you!"

"Yes, I mean to be complimentary. I know few men to come up to my dog. He is a happy fellow, too; I would willingly change places with him myself. Bruno has no conscience. Bruno can sleep o' nights; he requires no opiates; he has no duties that he fails to fulfil; he is at peace with man and with himself. I envy no man as I envy Bruno."

Dan was evidently in one of his curious moods. Marriage did not seem to have rendered him happier; he was changed in appearance, and not for the better. His eyes had a curious distended, half-dazed look, suggestive of want of sleep; they were sunken and circled heavily with black. He was pale, his lips pinched, and a tinge of grey dimmed the gold of his fair curls. And yet Dan was not thirty. What had aged him so terribly? I thought of Annie with a thrill of alarm. What was the effect of this change in him on the woman who loved him?

"How is your wife?" I asked, subduing the difficulty I experienced in mentioning her to him.

He looked at me gloomily.

"She was a fool to give you up for me," he answered, after a little pause.

"You haven't answered me, Dan. Is she well—and happy?"

"Do I look like a man whose wife could be happy?"

He certainly did not. Poor Annie!

"Poor Annie, indeed!" said Dan, answering my thoughts; "it

was a bad day's work for her when she married me. We have been married nearly two years now, and I don't suppose either of us have had a moment's happiness during all that time. At least I can answer for myself."

"I am very sorry to hear this," I said gravely.

"Yes, I believe you really are; although you ought to be glad to know that I am a miserable man. I deserve to be."

He threw his extinguished pipe away and drew his chair nearer mine.

"Deceit and villany don't make a good basis for married life," he said bitterly. "My infamous, treacherous conduct to you has added a large item to the huge debt of hatred I owe myself, and debt is not a good thing to start with. You have forgiven me—I have not. I never shall. All my life I have known myself capable of every small vice and cowardly, creeping meanness, but—but I did not think even I, brute though I am, could be villain enough to betray my best friend, to steal from him what he prized most, to blacken him behind his back to the woman he loved. Do you think it was a happy moment for me when I found that no act was too vile for me to commit? Good God, man, it fills my whole soul with horror to think of what I am! If I met myself in another man I should think him too vile to touch even—but I could escape from him, I need never associate with such a brute—while now—Tom, can you imagine what it must be to be chained like a galley slave to a horrible being whom you loathe? Would you enjoy your life under such circumstances?"

He looked at me with an expression of absolute horror and despair.

"That is my case," he went on drearily. "I have just enough good in me to know how vile I am. The result is suffering—almost more of it than I can bear. Don't trouble to make any soothing remarks—they wouldn't help me. It's done me good to talk like this; but now I've unburdened myself you had better forget what I've said."

"And Annie, does she know all this?"

He smiled; it was a curiously unpleasant smile, and made me more anxious than ever for his poor wife.

"I think she knows me pretty well by this time; she has had some practical demonstration of my character. I have told you

that I suffer a good deal, isn't it part of a wife's duty to bear her husband's sufferings? I fancy, too, Annie has discovered that tenderness and constancy are not in the schedule of my numerous virtues. Besides, it was through her that I sank to a very low level of villany. I don't suppose it makes a man any fonder of his wife to feel that he owes his degradation to her."

His words enraged me.

"How dare you speak of her like that?" I cried, furious; "you, who by your own showing are not fit to breathe her name!" And I poured out a torrent of angry words, not one of which, however, seemed to rouse any feeling of anger in him. He settled himself comfortably in his chair and listened to me with all the calm attention he would have given to a lecture or a sermon.

"Thank you," he said, when I paused for want of words; "I have been very much edified."

He rose heavily to his feet.

"Good-bye, old fellow. You won't take my hand? I daresay you are right."

He paused a moment and held his left hand under the light of the gas burner. The wounds he had inflicted on it at Westminster had left deep scars upon its smooth white surface, and they showed livid in the light.

"Annie admires these scars," he said, glancing mockingly at me; "she looks upon them as the record of some honourable conflict. I have never told her their true origin—I leave that for you; I have left her some of her illusions."

He went to the door, but lingered there a moment irresolutely, turning the handle backwards and forwards.

"Come and see Annie sometimes," he said at last; "she was talking of you the other day—she—she will be glad to see you. There's our address;" he tossed a card towards me; "you needn't be afraid of meeting me, I am not often at home."

The door closed behind him, and the fog, dispersed by his movements, gathered again in the recesses of the room.

If my thoughts had been dreary before my cousin's entrance they were drearier now. Annie was unhappy, there was no doubt of that, and what could I do to help her? I would have given my life to save her from trouble, but I was absolutely helpless.

* * * * *

In a few days I went to see Mrs. Crossfield. Poor Annie; the change in Dan was reflected and intensified in her. Her dancing eyes had lost their light, her cheeks their roundness, her pale lips had forgotten their old trick of smiling; her whole face wore a sad anxious look pitiable to see.

She seemed glad to see me, but was pathetically nervous and diffident. She told me she had few friends in London; that Dan's profession kept him much away and that she was very lonely. If she had said absolutely forlorn and wretched she would have been nearer the truth. Her face was franker than her words.

"Annie," I said at last, after a chat on indifferent matters, "I can't call you Mrs. Crossfield—I made you a promise once—will you promise me something in your turn?"

She put her thin little hand confidently in mine. "Yes, I will. You see I don't say 'what is it?' as you did. I know I can trust you."

"Then promise me to forget the past; don't let it rise between us like a shadow. Forget that I ever loved you, and let me be your friend. You have been married two years now; my love for you is an old story, and old stories are soon forgotten. I speak from bitter literary experience. I've got over all my foolishness now, of course, got over and forgotten it long ago."

"Of course, of course," said Annie quickly.

I thought she didn't look quite pleased; I suppose even the best of women doesn't quite like the idea of a man getting over his love for her.

"And then I—I daresay—that is to say"—I went on stammeringly, "I—I shouldn't be surprised if I thought of—of getting married myself some day."

"I am glad to hear it," she answered. She looked at me very keenly while I stumbled through my wretched attempt at acting.

I could see that she had detected me in my egregious lying, I always was a poor hand at private theatricals. But she looked far from displeased; in fact she smiled, the first smile I had seen on that changed haggard face of hers.

"So it's all settled," I said, "you will let me be your friend—your true friend, and if ever you are in trouble you must come to me."

"Yes," she answered softly, "I will."

"And now to cement our friendship; I have a box for the theatre in my pocket, won't you and Dan come with me?"

"Dan won't be in to-night," she answered, a pained look shadowing her face, "he—he is dining out somewhere."

"Then let me take you. Dan asked me to come and see you, he would be glad for you to have a little amusement."

"Do you think so?" There was a tinge of bitterness in her voice. "Very well, then, it is very kind of you—I haven't been to the theatre for months."

We went to see that delightful satire, "Utopia Limited;" I had taken a box that morning on the chance of being able to persuade Annie to accompany me—I thought the liveliness of the piece might cheer her. And it did. The bright lights and charming dresses, the pretty music and witty words, the rollicking light-heartedness of the whole thing made her forget her troubles. I saw the light come back to her sad eyes, the colour to her hollow cheeks; she looked once more the bonny Annie of two years ago.

It was towards the end of the first act, and we were both leaning forward, I, intent upon the stage, Annie glancing round the crowded house through her opera-glasses. Suddenly I felt her start and shiver, and her hand clutched mine as though in need of support. I followed the direction of her eyes, and started in my turn. Dan and a handsome, richly-dressed woman had just come into the opposite box. I looked at Annie; she had turned very white.

"Don't let him see me," she murmured.

I drew the curtain on her side of the box, and then took a good look at my cousin's companion. She was beautiful, of course—Dan's taste in beauty was always beyond reproach—and as dark as his wife was fair. I could not help noticing the fine contrast they made; their heads were very near together, and the effect of her black locks against his fair curls was most artistic. She was a tall, stately-looking woman, and I could read in Dan's eyes, as he looked at her, all the love and pride that had once been there when he looked at Annie.

Poor Annie! Here was the key to some of her husband's enigmatical remarks.

I turned to her with what I intended as a comforting suggestion.

"I suppose Dan has brought his hostess on here, as I have brought you."

"No, no," she said, in an agonized voice; "I know better. I have seen her before—she——" Her voice faltered and died away. "Take me home, Tom," she said faintly; "you know now what a miserable woman I am. Take me home quickly."

I helped her downstairs and put her into a cab.

"No, you needn't see me home," she said; "I am best alone. Good-bye, Tom—good-bye, my only friend." She leant wearily back and the slow tears fell down her face.

All night I lay awake, all night I saw that sad, patient face with the tears shining on the thin cheeks, and all night I anathematized the scoundrel who had wrecked the poor child's life.

After that night I saw a great deal of Annie Crossfield; my presence was a comfort to her, I could see, and she was greatly in need of comfort. Dan was hardly ever at home. I could read in her face how absolutely he neglected her.

The months went on, and day by day I saw Annie growing paler and thinner and more forlorn. All this time I had only had two glimpses of Dan, and even then we had not exchanged more than a word or two. I felt hardly able to speak to him, and my feeling of dislike and enmity was evidently shared by him.

One evening when I dropped in after dinner at Hazel Terrace, according to my weekly custom, to my surprise I heard Dan's voice in the drawing-room. He was speaking in loud and angry tones, and Annie was sobbing. Her sobs made my blood boil, and I pushed open the door and went quickly in; it would have been better, perhaps, not to have done so, but I thought she might need my help.

Annie was kneeling by the arm-chair, her face buried in her hands, Dan was standing over her with a white, furious face.

"I forbid you to speak to him again," he was saying; but he paused, and Annie started to her feet as I entered. When she saw who it was, she gave a faint cry and fell inertly back into the chair, as though her limbs were unable to support her.

Dan fixed his flashing eyes upon me, and smiled one of his unpleasant smiles.

"Talk of the devil, &c. &c. You couldn't have arrived more opportunely. I have just been telling my wife there—your old love, if I remember correctly—that she sees a deuced deal too much of you. If you wait a minute she will give you your *congé* with her own lips."

"I am sorry you should know me so little," I answered calmly; "and still more sorry that you should deprive your wife of a friend when she needs one so sorely."

"What in the devil's name d'you mean by that?" cried Dan savagely. "She has her husband—what more does she want?"

"I will leave you to answer that question."

He stood glaring at me for a moment, then turned to Annie, who stood pale and trembling, turning frightened eyes from one to the other.

"Come, do as I bid you; tell your—admirer to leave the house and never enter it again."

His words roused her half-forgotten spirit. She rose to her feet and faced him bravely.

"How dare you speak to me like that before your cousin?—you, of all men——"

He interrupted her.

"Do as I bid you."

"I will not, Dan. Oh, Dan, for God's sake think of what you are doing—he is your cousin—you have wronged him enough already, don't insult him now."

"Do as I bid you, or——"

"I tell you I *will* not."

They looked at each other in silence for a moment, then he raised his hand, and before I could fling myself between them he struck her down. She fell to the ground like a log, without a cry or a groan.

I raised her head upon my knee; she was quite insensible.

"Have I killed her?" asked Dan hoarsely.

"It is not your fault that you have not," I answered.

He lifted her up and placed her in a chair, then rang the bell. In a minute or two the maid-servant came in.

"Help your mistress to her room," he said; "she has fainted."

By this time Annie had opened her eyes and began to look about her in a dazed kind of way, and the maid was able half to

lead, half to carry her out without much difficulty; the poor little wasted figure was light enough in all conscience.

Dan turned his eyes upon me, and the look of horror and agony in them carried me back once more to those old days at Westminster. My heart softened towards him; after all he was still capable of suffering.

"Dan," I said, "can nothing be done?"

He covered his face with his hands.

"No, no," he groaned; "it is too late, I have taken the last fatal step, it is all over."

He started up and caught my hand in a grasp that made me wince.

"I tell you I can't bear it any longer; I won't bear it any longer! I have fallen to the lowest degradation of all, I have struck my wife in your presence. Yesterday there was still hope for me, I could still believe myself incapable of *that*; to-day I am past all hope. The demon I carry within me has cut the ground from under my feet, torn every glimmer of light from me. I am lost! lost!"

His voice rose to a shriek, then died away into a long sigh of weariness and utter discouragement.

"Don't talk like that, Dan; don't be a coward; it is never too late to redeem the past. Shake off this absurd weakness, show us the good you are capable of."

He smiled sadly.

"No, no, Tom, it can't be, thank you all the same. The struggle's over, I give up. I haven't been a happy man, it's time I freed myself; poor slaves free themselves sometimes; why not I?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, vaguely alarmed.

"I mean that I am tired out, dead-beat. Good-night, Tom, old fellow; God bless you, if blessings don't turn to curses on the lips of such a beast as I. I shall sleep well to-night, I'm tired, tired."

He laid his head down upon the table and I left him in silence. I turned at the door by some involuntary impulse and looked at him again. He had not stirred, and I noticed idly how his pretty, fair curls shone and glistened in the mellow lamp-light.

The next morning when I came down to my early and frugal breakfast, the unkempt little maid-of-all-work put a letter into

my hand. It was from Dan. I tore it open and read these words, written in his usual bold steady hand, without a trembling or irresolute line in it.

"DEAR OLD MAN,

"By the time you receive this I shall have taken out my free papers—invested in a passport to eternity. Don't be shocked, it is better so; I have always known that this must be the end; I have always seen this shadow lurking for me in the future. My life has been one long torture to me, it is time I ended it; I shall soon be free, *free*! Oh, the meaning of that word; freedom from degradation and crime, freedom from *myself*. No poor starved and beaten slave has ever longed for freedom as I have; no prisoner has ever shaken off his chains with the joy that I shall feel. It seems almost too great a boon to be bestowed on such a vile brute as I am. I can't bear my life any longer; I can't live with the dreadful creature that inhabits me. I mean to escape; I mean to kill my enemy. At last I can revenge myself *on* myself, but not enough to repay all my sufferings. I tell you, Tom, I should like to hack myself into small pieces, to burn myself at a slow fire, nothing else could appease my hatred. But Annie! what would she feel? So I shall put her feelings before my own, for the first time in my life, and the last. I must confine my revenge to what a blunt and jagged razor can inflict. Good-night and good-bye. Don't pity me *now*, my prison bars will soon be broken; thank God that our life contains the infinite boon of death! Of course you will marry Annie and make her happy; for Heaven's sake teach her to forget that there ever existed such a vile and abject creature as

"YOUR COUSIN DAN."

It took me only a second to glance through this dreadful letter. I looked at my watch; a quarter past eight; was it too late? I felt morally certain that it was; however, I hailed a passing cab and told the man to drive for his life to Hazel Terrace. We were there in a few seconds, the house looked quiet, there was no crowd of people on the steps, evidently nothing was yet known of the tragedy that had probably occurred.

The neat maid opened the door, there was no dismay in her face, only a mild surprise at my early appearance.

"Your master," I gasped ; "is he up?"

"He's in his study, sir ; he's been there since near six o'clock, and gave me particular orders he was not to be disturbed."

I went quickly to the study door and knocked softly.

"Dan, are you there?"

No answer. I turned the handle—the door was unlocked—I opened it and went in. Yes, Dan had taken out his free papers. He was lying across the sofa dead, and almost cold, his throat horribly gashed, the jagged razor clutched tight in his stiffening hand. It was a horrible sight, but when I saw his face the horror passed away. His features bore a smile that transformed them into the old seraphic beauty of his boyish days. The hard lines of pain and struggle had faded out, the whole face wore a wonderful look of rest, the rest of one who has cast off an intolerable burden. I could feel no pity for my cousin ; Dan was free at last.

Antinoë.

By A. M. JUDD.

CHAPTER I.

THE setting sun was throwing its rays across the embrowned tints and wild rugged peaks of the surrounding mountains. It lighted up the paintings in the portico of one of the many temples on the island of Philoë in the Nile. The tints were as vivid apparently as they had been when first put on some thousands of years before ; perhaps the reason of this was that it was less exposed to the heat of the sun than some of its neighbours. There were four front columns, which originally had been joined together by a wall, according to the Egyptian style of architecture, but this had been thrown down.

The paintings represented various Egyptian deities. There was Osiris with his high-peaked cap, Isis in attendance upon her husband, figures with the heads of the hawk and the ibis, the scarabæus and other sacred emblems, all done in the highest style of Egyptian magnificence. But this magnificence was in part obscured by a crust of mud, and crosses had been carved on the pillars and columns, which seemed rather incongruous in the ruins of a heathen temple dedicated to the worship of Egyptian deities.

And the sounds that were issuing from the interior of the building were not less so. No chant to Isis was that which rose and fell upon the evening air, mingling with the roar of the cataract as it swirled among the granite rocks in the bed of the Nile. Those voices raised in a hymn of praise were addressing the God of the Christians, who had been put to a shameful death on the cross some three hundred years before, and whose followers were now being persecuted with the utmost rigour by the caliphs.

So heavy had that persecution become that the Christians, to escape the fury of their persecutors, retired to the most distant and remote recesses to perform their worship. This place, being far from the seat of their rulers, and situated in an island of the

Nile, among the rocks of granite which form the first cataract, was fitted up for a Christian church.

It was the Christians who had thrown down the wall between the columns, who had covered the sculptures with mud so that their eyes might not be offended by the sight of the Egyptian gods, and who had placed the crosses, emblems of their own faith, on the pillars and the door.

Strange indeed must have been the scene when this temple, built for the worship of the hawk-headed deity, was consecrated by a Christian bishop to the service of his Master; consecrated in secrecy and with none of the pomp that afterwards surrounded the ceremonies of the despised and persecuted religion. Hither came those who dared not openly avow their adherence to the new creed, which, in spite of all efforts to stamp it out, was spreading far and wide, striking dismay into the hearts of those who saw their old faiths being demolished and the gods in whom they believed being set at nought.

Truly was it a strange scene inside that ruined temple whence issued the voices raised in adoration of the Crucified. There in that grand interior, with its columns and obelisks, its profusion of sculptures and delicate chisellings, were gathered together a mere handful of men and women, some old and weary, despairing of the emancipation which they were taught to believe would come sooner or later, when they would be free from the yoke of their Roman masters, and able to worship openly as they now did secretly; but the time seemed long in coming, and many of those older ones sometimes felt their faith failing them at the long-delayed realization of those hopes and better times so confidently predicted by the monks, whose faith and enthusiasm never wavered through all the storm of persecution which followed them so relentlessly; rather were they confirmed in their belief by the hardships they were called upon to endure. Some of that small band were aged and weary, it is true, but others there were in the full flush of youth, to whom life yet was a beautiful thing in which there were grand possibilities to be achieved, great reforms to be made, if only they remained steadfast to the object they had in view; to whom even the martyr's crown of glory was a desirable thing to be obtained, no matter at what cost of personal suffering and torture.

In the midst of that assembly knelt one who, with soft eyes

upraised and slender hands clasped in adoration, was the very embodiment of innocent enthusiasm and glorious faith in those principles which Christianity teaches, but which at that time were held accursed both by the worshippers of Osiris and Isis and the votaries of the heathen gods of Rome.

As the music rose and swelled, so did her voice in clear thrilling tones join in the hymn of praise that echoed through the vast columns of the temple that were decorated with those mystic, varied and fantastic sculptures characteristic of Egyptian architecture, groups, hieroglyphics, figures of deities and sacred animals, emblems of a religion which her ancestors professed, but which she had renounced as pagan mysteries no longer worthy of credence.

Her whole soul was absorbed in the service, she thought of nothing else; but a young man not far from her was paying little attention to the rites; his eyes were fixed on her fair face, not a change in muscle or expression escaped him, and he bent eagerly forward to catch every tone of the sweet voice as it was wafted heavenwards.

Even here in this temple dedicated to the worship of pagan deities and now turned to a very different purpose, even here had penetrated the shafts of the little blind god who has existed from the beginning of space, who is everywhere, and who will exist until time shall be no more; that god whose power is universal and whose name is—Love.

For the sake of Antinoë, Glaucus, Roman patrician though he was, had given up home and friends and station and thrown in his lot with the persecuted Christians, knowing that so only would there be any chance of finding favour in her sight.

"My son, you have not kneeled." A touch on his arm and the voice of the aged monk in his ear suddenly startled him back to a knowledge of his present surroundings. He had been thinking of Antinoë, of her only, and was not aware that the rest of the congregation were kneeling to receive the parting benediction of the officiating priest, till informed of the fact that he was the only one standing.

"Pardon, my father," he said, and hurriedly sank upon his knees, though even in this position of humility his eyes, instead of being devoutly lowered, still sought the face of his idol.

Yes, Antinoë was his religion. It was doubtful if he even

understood the tenets of the new faith to which he had been converted. It was for her sake that he gave up the worship of the gods, yet he was hardly a Christian, though to please her he had been baptized.

He lingered behind while the worshippers filed out of the temple on to the rocks on which it had been built, waiting for the boats that were to take them from the island to the opposite shore.

He saw that Antinoë yet knelt, apparently wrapped in ecstasy, and he dared not disturb her devotions. He was not sure of her love. There were times when he fancied that she returned the affection that had been kindled in his breast for her. At others, he feared that she would never respond to an earthly passion. There was something ethereal about her, something not of this world, that seemed to mark her as one apart from the common herd of humanity. She was of the stuff of which martyrs are made. She would have gone to the stake or the fangs of wild beasts without a murmur; but —, and here Glaucus always owned to himself that he was in doubt. Would she ever condescend to leave heavenly for earthly things; would she so far forget the religion to which at present she seemed wholly given up, as to nestle in his arms as his wife and become the mother of his children? As yet he could not tell, he had never dared waken her from the holy calm in which she was enveloped to tell her of the love which had sprung almost unbidden into being at the first sight of her, yet he lived on hope. Surely sooner or later such affection as his must meet with some return.

He knew that already communities of men and women were being formed, pledged to a celibate life and the service of their Saviour, and sometimes a cold chill came over him as he thought perhaps Antinoë, in her religious fervour and enthusiasm, might be induced to join such a sisterhood. He shuddered as he pictured all that loveliness hidden away, immured in a cloister; he fancied he would rather know that she was dead than given over to such a fate, for to the erstwhile luxurious Roman it seemed a fearful one indeed.

True, he himself had given up much for the sake of Antinoë, but secretly he was looking forward to a time when he would be able to return to all that he had left, with the Christian maiden for his bride. He did not remember how impossible it would be

that he could ever regain what he had lost, or to declare openly that he had married one of the hated and persecuted sect, and even outwardly conformed to its tenets himself; but when does a lover ever count the cost? At that time he would have counted the world well lost for love.

At last he saw her rise from her knees; in an instant he was by her side. "Antinoë," he said softly, letting his eyes rest eagerly and lovingly upon her pale face.

"Have the others gone?" she asked, calmly looking round the now deserted temple.

"They are outside. I waited for you," he returned.

"Was it not grand, Glaucus?" she asked dreamily.

"Yes," he murmured, not knowing to what she alluded.

"I never heard the good father more eloquent, more impassioned; his words sank into my soul. Did you not feel the majesty of them?"

Glaucus hurriedly assented. The truth was he had not heard one single word of the discourse, his thoughts had been centred upon her, but he could not tell her so; her interest was in his soul as yet, but soon he would waken it for something that touched him more nearly. Slowly they moved out side by side on to the arid rocks that composed the island, which exhibited then a confusion of grand and beautiful buildings, rivalling those left by the greatest cities of Egypt. Eight different temples had been built on that severe site, apparently at different periods, and their elegant forms and dazzling white colour strikingly contrasted with the brown tint of the rocks and the rugged peaks of the surrounding mountains.

It was a grand sight, if a somewhat stern one, and lovers of the picturesque would have lingered to watch the varying shades cast by the declining rays on pillar and obelisk, but neither of those two paid any attention to the rugged grandeur of the scene, because their thoughts were fully occupied with other matters.

At the portico, the same old monk who had touched Glaucus on the shoulder waited patiently. In some measure he looked upon those two as belonging to him, for it was owing to him, or he thought so, that they both were saved from perdition, for simple creature that he was, the monk, Theodore, imagined there could be no salvation for those outside the pale of the true faith.

"The second boat waits, my children," he said. "If you do not quicken your steps it will go without you. I stayed, for I thought you would not like to be left here alone."

Glaucus thought he would not have minded had only Antinoë been his companion; he would be content to live anywhere with her, even in the desert, or on that arid rock; but the girl, startled out of her placid calm at the alternative thus presented to her, hastened after her companions, and with the young man and the monk was soon landed on the opposite shore.

As before stated, the Christians used to come to the island of Philoë for the purpose of worship, because it was far from the seat of their rulers, and they hoped to escape the fury of their persecutors; but at last by some means it was discovered that the temple had been consecrated, and they were driven from here and forced to seek more distant and remote recesses.

Fiercer than ever raged the persecution, and Glaucus gradually saw his dreams of a happy future with Antinoë fading away. Even should she become his bride, they would still be hunted, and perhaps tortured to death, as so many had been. For them would be no peaceful future, full of the joys of domesticity; they were marked, doomed for an unhappy fate, and perhaps a lingering, horrible death.

At last he realized what he had done in thus cutting himself off from his own people, but he never repented. Antinoë was the whole world to him, she was more than relations or honour. Could he undo what he had done, he would not. For her sake he became a fugitive, with her and for her he would live and die.

At length, no longer could the persecuted band of Christians walk about in safety. Numbers of them were killed, and the remnant fleeing for their lives sought refuge in caverns, in remote recesses of the rocks and in the sepulchres themselves.

This last is not an uncommon thing among the natives at the present time, some of the Arabs living in the entrance of the caves of their own free choice; making partitions with earthen walls, they form them into habitations for themselves and for their animals, dressing their wives and children in mummy cloth, taken from the dead, adorning their womankind with ornaments rifled from the tombs, and giving their children playthings gathered from the same gruesome toyshop, using the mummy cases for fuel, and heating the ovens where they bake their

bread with the same, together with the bones of mummies, the asphaltum or bitumen which embalmed them, and the linen bandages that had enveloped them.

The Arabs do this from choice, and because they derive a profitable income from mummy-hunting ; but it was not from choice that Glaucus, Theodore, Antinoë and some half-dozen other hunted men and women sought a refuge in the caverns that intersect the Lybian chain of mountains.

In these subterranean galleries, for some months, did the fugitives eke out a miserable existence, surrounded by mummies and the relics of decaying mortality, scarcely daring to venture forth even in search of necessary food until compelled by hunger to do so. But, even here, they were not safe ; baffled love even more than hate found out their abode, and once again they had to flee.

It was hardly to be expected that a girl of Antinoë's beauty would not attract admirers, and a young Egyptian, Renoth by name, had long cast his eyes upon the maid ; but Antinoë cared nothing for earthly loves, and would not listen to his suit. He half suspected that she had become a Nazarene, but while he hoped there was any chance for him he kept his suspicions to himself. When, however, he realized that the beautiful lotos-flower would never bloom for him, disappointed love turned to bitterest hate, and he determined that no other should secure the prize he coveted.

Unknown to the Christians, he had followed them to the island of Philoë, and witnessed the sacrilegious insult, as he deemed it, offered to the gods of his ancient faith. He had seen, too, what touched him more nearly, for even in that day the worship of the gods of Rome was superseding that of Osiris and Isis ; he had seen Glaucus, and having been a lover himself, he knew what that devotion meant, and a great hatred rose up in his breast against his rival, whom he knew for one of the invaders who were now masters of Egypt. Thus, he had a double cause to dislike the Roman, and he knew if he could be identified with the Christians it would work his ruin, for in Rome the persecution of the followers of Christ was as great as it was in Egypt. He it was who had set spies to work, so that no longer could they worship in the temple of Philoë ; and he it was who, like a sleuth-hound, tracked them down even to their gruesome place of refuge.

He watched and waited, and one day, in the dusk of the evening, he saw Antinoë alone; but how different from the beautiful girl he remembered. Her face was pale, her cheeks sunken, and her eyes had an unnatural brilliancy, while her white garments were torn and soiled. She had come out from the stifling atmosphere of those subterranean chambers to breathe for a few moments the purer air.

Cautiously he approached her, and when she would have fled on recognizing him, he seized her by the arm and forced her to listen to him by dint of the threats he used. The sight of her revived his passion, and he argued, prayed, implored and threatened by turns. If she would fly with him, he would take her to a place of safety, where they might live in a world of bliss of their own making. He painted in vivid terms the horrible tortures she and all with her would undergo if she persisted in her resolution of remaining a Christian, and finally, he declared if she did not yield to his entreaties, he would bring down the persecutors upon them, for he gave her to understand that at present he was the only one who had found out their retreat.

It was all useless. She turned a deaf ear alike to persuasions and threats. "A Christian she was, and a Christian she would die," she returned calmly to all his expostulations; "and she never intended to marry, she looked to something higher than mere earthly things. A crown of glory awaited her in the heavens; she cared not how soon she should reach it."

Finding he could not move her, Renoth grew exasperated, and left her after hurling the most terrible denunciations at her and her companions; winding up by saying "she should see him again ere long at the head of a body of men who would take her and her companions and hand them over to the tender mercies of those whose laws they had defied and broken."

Though outwardly calm and unconcerned, Renoth's words were not without their effect upon Antinoë.

Not for herself did she fear; this terrible life she was leading was so wearisome she would not be sorry to have it ended, but there were her companions—the monk Theodore, Glaucus, Ismenia, a girl who also had embraced the Christian faith, and one or two others who had taken refuge in the sepulchre.

She must warn them, for life is dear to all, and she could not allow them to be sacrificed before her eyes.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT ails you, my daughter? you seem troubled."

These words were addressed to Antinoë by Theodore, on his return to the cavern. He, as well as Glaucus, had been out seeking for food, and he was struck by the depressed attitude of the girl.

For answer, she related to him what had passed with Renoth.

The monk's brows contracted as he listened. "It is the will of God," he said; "but when shall we have peace? when shall these troublous times cease?"

"If only I had power," cried Glaucus fiercely, for a moment regretting that he had thrown up his rank, "I would crush that slave who dares to threaten Antinoë; he should be thrown to the wild beasts he is so fond of talking about."

"Hush, my son," the monk said mildly, "those are not Christian principles; rather than talk of vengeance, let us think what is best to be done for our present safety."

"We cannot stay here," the young man returned with a gloomy look upon his face. Were it not for Antinoë, he would have stayed and braved the foe, but he knew to what she would be exposed were she to fall into the hands of the fanatics. At all costs, some haven of refuge securer than that must be found for her.

"No," Theodore answered thoughtfully. "By accident, I discovered a place which may yet prove a safe hiding-place."

Asked to explain, he said that wandering in the valley he had come upon a narrow gorge or ravine, that led by a winding track into the heart of the Lybian mountains. That he had come upon the entrance of a tomb which no one would have suspected, and that going in he saw labyrinth after labyrinth of passages, and he thought there they would be able to defy the search of their persecutors. He was almost certain he could find the entrance again.

It was decided that no time should be lost in seeking this fresh resting-place, for at any moment Renoth might fulfil his threat and return with an armed band.

It was a melancholy procession which started to find its way to this fresh haven; it consisted of only five persons, for to this number had they dwindled. Theodore went first to show the

way; Glaucus assisted Antinoë over the rough stones, while Ismenia sought to guide the tottering steps of an old woman whose span of life the hardships she had endured were evidently shortening.

It was a long and painful pilgrimage through those desert mountains, and more than once the old woman had sunk to the ground declaring she could go no further, and imploring her companions to leave her to her fate; but this they would not do, and the monk and Glaucus, between them, carried her.

So they traversed for more than two miles that winding gorge till a narrow chasm between the rocks opened into "the Valley of the Tombs," a gloomy solitude, presenting a most arid and desolate aspect. High mountains with rocky summits bounded the horizon on all sides, and the heat in this inclosed place was so stifling that the old woman, who was already nearly dead, actually expired in the arms of Glaucus.

Finding that she really was dead beyond recall, they laid her in a chasm of the rock, and with considerable difficulty dragged some blocks of stone so as to protect the corpse from jackals and vultures, and after having said a prayer resumed their toilsome way, leaving the dead to her repose in that silent place.

Not a murmur of complaint passed the lips of either girl though the death of their aged companion cast a fresh gloom over them. Would they ever reach the end of their journey alive? was the thought in both minds, but they gave no expression to it.

Antinoë felt an almost irresistible longing to lie down and die too, but for the sake of her companions she would not give way to the feeling.

So the weary march continued along the tracts of rocks called Gournou. All along here the rocks were hollowed out into chambers and galleries where the ancient inhabitants deposited their dead. Indeed, the original inhabitants of Thebes are supposed to have dwelt in caverns in the rocks, perhaps these very same caverns, which were afterwards enlarged and excavated artificially into those catacombs to which none other in the world can compare, and which attest the vast population of a city whose antiquity reaches far beyond all historical notice, for the temples and obelisks of Thebes had already begun to decay

when Menès, the first king of the country, commenced the building of Memphis. Strangely enough, though the exact site of Memphis cannot now be determined, Thebes, though of so much greater antiquity, still exists and, though ruined, has resisted in a wonderful manner the inroads of time, of ignorance, and of barbarity.

The monk Theodore held on till the sacred valley of Bebanel-Malook was reached. Here they halted while he carefully tried the rock, which was a calcareous stone of an exceedingly white colour. No opening was to be seen, so jealously did the ancient Egyptians seek to guard the resting-places of their dead, especially their royal dead, and it was here that were the "Tombs of the Kings."

But all their precautions had not availed, for at a very remote age the rifling of tombs was a trade. These sacrilegious robberies, crimes of frightful enormity in the eyes of the ancient Egyptians, were not as at the present day for the purpose of dragging the illustrious dead from their resting-places to expose them to the gaze of wondering moderns in various museums in different quarters of the globe, but for the sake of the jewels and gold that were deposited with them. It was for this reason that the mummies were concealed with such anxious ingenuity.

At length Theodore seemed to have found what he was searching for. Calling for Glaucus, he bade the young man assist him, and soon, to the astonishment of the girls, a portion of what seemed solid rock moved inwards, disclosing an aperture about two feet wide. Crawling through this he told the others to follow. When they had got through this narrow passage, which was only possible on hands and knees, they came to a staircase hewn out of the rock; descending this they found themselves in a long gallery or corridor along which they cautiously proceeded. On either side were chambers, each with its separate entrance. But not yet was reached the place where the monk hoped they might rest secure.

At the end of this long gallery their progress was suddenly arrested by a large pit, very deep and wide, apparently one of the pits into which salted mummies were placed. To all appearance this was the end of this subterranean abode, but the monk evidently did not think so. Kneeling down, by the aid of a small lamp he carried, Theodore examined carefully the sides

of the pit. There were projections which formed a sort of rude staircase or ladder, and a rope hanging from a beam appeared to have been used formerly for descending the pit.

"It is down there we must go," he said, pointing to the blackness.

Both the girls shrank back and Antinoë exclaimed:

"Surely the pit must be full of mummies."

"You need not be afraid, my child!" he returned; "the pit contains nothing but rubbish. I have been down it."

Thus reassured, the girls made no further demur but descended. When they had arrived at the bottom, Theodore showed them a small opening that had been forced through the wall. It had been closely shut up, plastered over and painted like the rest of the sides of the pit. Some one before them must have discovered that it was the entrance to magnificent galleries and halls, in fact the real resting-places of the kings. But for that aperture it would have been impossible to suppose there could have been any further proceeding, it seemed as though the tomb ended with the pit when it was only really just commencing.

It would be hard to describe the magnificence of those labyrinthine corridors to which they now penetrated; the vivid colours of the sculptures and the extraordinary figures on the walls and ceilings would have filled an ordinary observer with astonishment, but these fugitives were too weary and footsore to care about anything except finding a place to lay their heads.

Antinoë was too exhausted even to notice that Glaucus was summarily displacing a mummy in the hopes of making her a convenient resting-place, or that he had taken a wooden portrait statue to form a pillow for her head.

What a place it was! and this was to be their abode for an indefinite period.

True, there was not much chance of their being found here, for the existence of these caverns was probably known to only one or two of the descendants of those priests to whom the secret had been formerly intrusted in the remote ages, when the Pharaohs were laid in these magnificent tombs, to await the ten thousand years that must elapse before body, soul, intelligence and "Ka" would be brought together again for all eternity. But, after all, was such a life worth leading, surrounded by

mummies everywhere, nearly suffocated by the intense heat which prevailed in the tombs, cut off from all intercourse with the outer world, buried while yet alive, with the mortal remains of those who had lived their little day thousands of years before?

Scarcely, and yet one at least of those four was not wholly unhappy.

To be with Antinoë, to occasionally feel her hand in his, to hear her soft voice, that was joy to Glaucus, even though they were immured in this living tomb; and the maiden, though not loving him in the manner he wished, yet turned to him in her desolation for the support she so sadly needed.

She missed him when he went out, as he was obliged to do sometimes in search of food, for they were in danger of starvation in that terrible place, and if he was gone longer than usual she was a prey to dreadful apprehensions. He might be killed, and there was always the fear he might be followed and their retreat discovered by their implacable foe, Renoth.

It soon became evident, too, that they could not exist for long in these underground caverns.

Already the privations were telling heavily upon them. Theodore was failing and Ismenia showed signs of aberration of intellect. She would wander away for hours, and sometimes they had great difficulty in finding her, and when brought back to the chamber they had cleared and used for a dwelling-place, she would mutter and talk of the strange sights she had seen.

She fancied the mummies were alive and held conversations with them; at other times she would begin to unroll the fine linen bandages in which they were wrapped, removing the lids of the cases for this purpose.

It was a terrible sight to see that young girl full of life among these mummified remains, treating them as though they were in a condition to hear and understand what she was saying, and sometimes Antinoë felt that if it went on much longer her brain, too, would turn and she should be bereft of sense like her unfortunate friend.

At last there came a day when Ismenia was not to be found. She had wandered away, and though Glaucus and the monk searched for days after her disappearance, no trace could be found of the unhappy girl; her fate remained shrouded in mystery. Whether she had lost her way in the labyrinth of

corridors and galleries that extended, none knew how far, into the interior of the mountains, or whether with the cunning of insanity she had managed to make her way out unaided from the tomb, was a matter of conjecture, but she was never seen again by her companions.

There were only those three left, and it was evident to Glaucus that soon they would be reduced to two. For some little time he had been revolving the possibility of something in his mind, and seeing how the monk was failing, he spoke to him on this subject so near his heart. The monk saw the force of his arguments and agreed to speak to Antinoë.

The girl had felt the loss of her only remaining female companion very much, and was plunged in a hopeless apathy from which it was almost impossible to arouse her, though Glaucus tried with touching sedulousness to console and comfort her.

"Marry Glaucus!" she exclaimed in startled tones when Theodore had broached the subject to her.

"Yes, my daughter," he returned; "I can join your hands before I go."

"But, but, my father, I do not care to marry. I had hoped to join one of those sisterhoods you told me about, where we can dedicate our existence to our Lord and Master," she returned.

"Oh, my child," he said, "I did at one time hope that you might become one of those holy women, but fate has willed otherwise, and I see nothing for you but a marriage with Glaucus."

"Father, is this a time for thinking of such worldly things, and in this horrible place?" shuddering as she looked at the mummy-cases ranged round the wall.

"It is precisely because we *are* here that I counsel it, my daughter. Nay, listen," as she was about to speak; "I will not conceal from you that I am going to leave you ——"

"Father?"

"Aye, not willingly indeed; but the summons can not be far off now; I feel I am dying, and then you will be alone with Glaucus. I would not speak to you of this only it is better you should be his wife. If ever deliverance comes to you, and I pray that your young life may not end here, you could only go back to the world wedded to him. You understand, my child?"

"I understand," she answered, falling back into her apathetic manner.

"You consent?"

"If you wish it."

"It is not my wish, but necessity's," he said gravely; "I will call Glaucus."

"Must it be so soon?" clasping her hands.

"Aye, child, if it is to be done at all."

What a marriage that was, what a mockery of the solemn rite that is usually surrounded by so much that is brilliant and festive. There, in that underground burying place where lay the remains of a long line of illustrious dead, whose pictured resemblances on coffin-lid and wooden portrait statue glared at them out of the enamel eyes with the stare of so many basilisks; where the idols of dazzling white stone or beautiful blue porcelain seemed to the excited fancy of the girl as so many grinning imps jeering at her; where the odour of myrrh and spices, with which some of the embalmed bodies had been covered, was almost overpowering and the heat stifling; in such a scene as this were the solemn words spoken by the dying monk that made Glaucus and Antinoë one.

The latter went through it all mechanically and submissively, but the young man, despite of his surroundings and the possibility that they might never leave the cavern alive, felt a wild thrill of joy pass through him when he clasped Antinoë in his arms and pressed his first kiss upon her shrinking lips.

The object for which he had given up so much was attained; Antinoë was his own, his wife at last. But not for long was even such happiness as this to be his portion.

Gradually the bride he had gained at such cost drooped and faded, she was hastening to the heaven which seemed her only fitting place.

He would not believe at first that this last hope of his miserable existence was going to be snatched from him by the relentless fate which had bereft him of so much; but so it was, and he at last could no longer doubt that she was following her companions. She would lie quiet for hours, never complaining, but singing the chants she had learned to love so well. Strange, indeed, must those hymns have sounded in the gloomy sepulchre,

where the dead had been placed with the dread rites of their ancient faith so many thousand years before.

Then came a time when she was too weak even to raise her voice, and Glaucus hung over her in speechless agony, supporting her head against his breast. In those last hours she must have loved him, for her eyes sought him incessantly did he leave her side for an instant, and she would nestle back against his breast with a sigh of contentment when he returned.

"My darling," he cried one day in heart-broken accents, when he realized that Antinoë was indeed hastening to that bourn whence no traveller ever returns. "My darling, stay with me; I cannot bear to let you go."

"Do not grieve, my Glaucus," she whispered faintly; "it is better so; think of the glorious promises of the Redeemer; we shall meet in that land where sin and sorrow are unknown."

But Glaucus would not be comforted—his Christianity was not deep enough to find faith and hope in the promises of a future life. He would have been content to pass the remainder of his existence in the tombs if only Antinoë could remain with him, but now she was dying, and to his hopeless view the future seemed dark indeed.

How could he believe promises when such misery was meted out to him on earth? What had he done that he should be a fugitive hiding in this horrible place? What had the innocent girl he loved so well done that she should be lying here, hunted to death, as much a martyr as those who were torn in pieces by the fangs of wild beasts, or perished in the most frightful tortures the skill of men, or rather of devils, could invent?

Could a God who was just allow such things to be? If there were any truth in this faith, which to Antinoë seemed so sublime, would not the founder of it have power to protect his followers?

What was true?

The ancient Egyptians, whose pictured resemblances sneered and mocked at him from the walls where they were depicted lotus-crowned—were they, too, all wrong about the faiths they had professed from time immemorial? What was the use of trying to solve the awful secrets which had baffled the learned sages of all time? What was the grief of those pictured mourners to his? They could never have felt one-tenth of the

pangs that were rending him as he saw his beloved dying before his eyes, and he powerless to add one moment to her allotted span, even though he would have willingly given his body to torments to be able to do so.

The wretched young man felt almost mad with despair ; he felt ready to curse himself, the day he was born, the persecutors who had reduced him to such a state, and the whole world.

It was nothing to him that in that gruesome place was treasure that would have made him rich beyond the wildest imaginings, if only he could have taken it out with him from that underground prison—gold ornaments of the most exquisite workmanship and delicate tracery belonging to the Pharaohs' daughters, whose remains had been hidden in those caverns so many ages before, in the fond but mistaken hope that they might rest undisturbed till the period of awakening and re-union should arise. Amphoræ of most elegant and graceful shapes ; scarabæi, the emblems of life, of basalt and verde-antico, worn on the breasts of the kingly mummies ; figures and statuettes of beautiful blue porcelain and bronze ; papyri, for which antiquaries, even in those days, were paying large sums, and which were found hidden in the mummies' breasts, under their arms, in the space between the knees, or on the legs, covered up in the numerous folds of cloth that enveloped them ; costly jewels, in rings and necklaces and head ornaments ; splendid turquoises of almost priceless value, embedded, perhaps, in the glossy black, parchment-like flesh of the fingers they had adorned in life.

It was nothing to him that he was surrounded by such and various other treasures ; the one appalling fact that Antinoë was dying shut out and obliterated the trace of every other feeling. He only knew that his love was powerless to keep her with him. He longed for death too, yet life, a hateful life, because it would have to be spent without Antinoë, seemed strong within him.

In that dread hour, when the wife he worshipped—as truly as those ancient Egyptians worshipped Isis in those far-away days when the sculptures had been traced upon the walls—breathed her last sigh in his arms, he would gladly have welcomed those whose fury had caused them to find a refuge in that dismal place ; he would have blessed the hand that should have slain him and sent him to rejoin his beloved in those realms of eternal light that she so firmly believed in.]

Antinoë was dead.

In all her fair young beauty she lay among those who had departed from earth-life thousands of years before. Not one of those dead-and-gone maidens, beloved though the inscriptions said they were, was more earnestly lamented than this descendant who died for the faith she believed to be true.

Many hours of agony were passed by Glaucus alone with his dead, ere he could summon resolution to leave the beloved corpse to the silence and repose of those vast tombs which covered the illustrious dead, and go out once more into the world in search of that death which should bring him release and re-union with his loved one.

Long was it ere he could make up his mind to tear himself away, but he knew it was useless attempting to take her with him, and at all events here her poor remains were safe from the fanatical fury which could wreak its unsatisfied vengeance on the dead. Besides, life out there would be the sooner ended for him.

So at last he went, with many a backward glance at the still figure so beautiful in its statuesque repose.

Antinoë was left to her last sleep in the Tomb of the Kings with a long line of Pharaohs, awaiting the final trump which shall waken alike Egyptian and Christian.

A Girl's Jolly.

By ANNIE THOMAS (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),

Author of "DENIS DONNE," "UTTERLY MISTAKEN," "THE
HONBLE. JANE," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LINK IN THE CHAIN.

THEY had been at Roche's Hotel, Glengariff, three or four days when Dick Ogilvie's letter in reply to the one Sylvia had injudiciously written was handed to her while she was breakfasting with her husband. Mr. Christopher had caught cold in driving from Bantry in an open car in heavy rain. The cold had developed feverish symptoms, and these in return had developed irritability to an altogether abnormal extent.

Unluckily there were no letters for him this morning, therefore he was able to concentrate all his suspicious attention upon his wife, who recognizing the handwriting turned a rosy-red that would have been lovely if it had not been caused by confusion and—the word must be written—fear. She could have slain Ann for delivering it so inopportunistically. But it did not occur to her that there was malice aforethought in Ann's act.

Noticing her blush and look of embarrassment, the tyrannical portion of his nature was stirred into instant action by his suspicion.

"Who is your correspondent?" he asked rudely.

"I have not opened the letter yet," she said, trying to speak lightly, as she put the letter down by her plate and began to pour out the coffee.

"It's a man's hand; it must be a bill, I suppose," he said, peering across the table to scan it more closely.

"I hate to have surmises made about my letters before I've read them myself," she said angrily.

"Why don't you make haste and read it, then?" he persisted; and thus goaded, Sylvia opened it with trembling hands and

glanced hastily at the opening words: "A thousand thanks darling, for your sweet letter ——"

Her heart thumped aloud with terror when she read this, and without daring to go on or to lift her eyes to her watchful husband's face she slipped the letter into her pocket, saying:

"A mere nothing after all. Won't you have some of this omelet? No! Well, we're wasting time sitting here this lovely day when we ought to be out of doors."

She rose and was going swiftly out of the room when she was arrested by his saying:

"Sylvia!"

"What is it?" she asked, holding the door open and looking back over her shoulder.

"Come and sit down; there is no hurry about going out. Read your letter, and then tell me who it's from."

"You will order me to show it to you next?" she said tauntingly.

"I shall!"

"This is how I obey such an ungentlemanly order," she said, flashing out defiance at him in look and words and tone, and in a moment she was tearing the letter into a dozen pieces.

"Your conduct is indecorous and disgusting." He spoke loudly and coarsely, and more than one or two of the servants and visitors at the hotel heard him.

"And your manner to me is—what I deserve for having been such a fool as to marry you," she flamed out, pursuing her work of destruction till scarcely a letter, much less a word, remained un mutilated.

"I wish I were dead," she went on, panting with anger and a sense of relief from the imminent danger of Dick's letter falling into her husband's hands; "better be dead, a thousand times better, than live to lead the dog's life I shall lead with you if you're going always to treat me as a child or a criminal."

"Perhaps you think it would be better if I were dead?" he asked threateningly.

"Yes, I do!" she replied, with such concentrated detestation for him in her tone that he made no further effort to detain her, and in a few minutes she was making her way through the picturesque garden up to the more wildly picturesque mountain passes into which that garden merges almost imperceptibly.

She was crying bitterly by this time. Crying, not because she had offended and insulted—and been offended and insulted by—her husband, but because she had been compelled to destroy Dick's loving letter before she had read and assimilated its pernicious sweetness with her other memories of him. It seemed to her too horribly unjust that through a bit of ponderous tyranny on her revolting husband's part she should have been deprived of the draught of emotional champagne which Dick's letter would have been to her. "It could have done no harm," she argued; "reading the letter would not have brought us nearer in the flesh to one another, and it would have been *such* happiness to read in black and white that he loved me still, and thought about me often." Many women derive a fair amount of comfort, not to say rapturous happiness, from the fond delusion that the men they like think of them—the deluded women—as constantly as the latter think about the men. It is a delusion, and the women who indulge in it invariably sup sorrow by the spoonful in the course of their relations, legal or unauthenticated, sacred or profane, with the opposite sex.

"A thousand thanks, darling, for your sweet letter." At least she had those "precious words to ponder upon," she told herself as she hurried up and up through the winding walks of the garden, and finally escaping, as she felt, from the trammels of civilization threw herself down on the slope of a bank that bordered a river which came bounding down from the grey-blue mountains to leap into Bantry Bay.

How she hated the prospect of the long life that would in all probability be hers, for she was young and strong in wind and limb. How she hated the friends and relations who had shoved her with gentle force into this fate. Her heart rose rebelliously even against her mother when she remembered the way in which she (Sylvia) had been dealt out by the maternal hand as the trump card when Mr. Christopher had not fancied Lily. How she hated herself, poor little disappointed, frightened, love-sick wretch, as she reflected that if she had only been staunch to Dick he could have married her now and placed her better in the social scale than Mr. Christopher had the power of doing.

Above all how she hated her husband!

She stayed away up among the hills for several hours, until it

was long past her usual luncheon time, and the pangs of her young healthy appetite drove her back to the hotel. She was met by the head waiter with the information that Mr. Christopher had gone out to look for her, and it gave her a certain amount of satisfaction to think of him panting and puffing up and down precipitous mountain paths in which his ponderous limbs would be greatly in the way, in search of one whom he would not find.

There was a sly, false expression on Ann's face, Sylvia thought, as the woman suavely uttered a hope that she "had not brought trouble upon her mistress by giving her that letter before master."

"Oh, no; it was of no consequence," Sylvia said coldly.

"I'm glad, indeed, of that," Ann said deferentially; "but we heard such angry talking that I was really afraid there was going to be violence. Master raved out 'more like a bull than a bridegroom,' as one or two of the hotel servants who heard him said to me afterwards. And when you came out saying you wished he was dead, lor! I did feel sorry for you."

"Did you hear me say it? I didn't mean it," Sylvia said quickly, feeling heartily ashamed of her rash words.

"I heard you, ma'am, and others heard you too. He must have used you badly to make you so wild."

"Don't speak of it any more," Sylvia said imperiously; and for a few moments there was silence, while Ann went on with her work of putting out the dress and ornaments which her mistress would wear at dinner.

Presently, however, the irresistible desire to annoy her mistress was too much for the woman's sense of expediency.

"Poor Bubble and Squeak! No one can tell how I miss those dear dogs, now that I am back with you again, ma'am," she said fawningly. But Sylvia saw the reflection of a most malicious twinkle in the woman's eyes in the looking-glass.

"We won't speak about my poor dogs, Ann. It's foolish of me, but I feel about them as much as if they were human beings; in fact, I loved them better than any human beings, excepting mamma and my sister——"

"And the one who gave them to you," Ann put in slyly. "Well, ma'am, I think a gentleman should do better than spend money on depriving his wife of what was an innocent pleasure to her."

"What do you mean, Ann?"

"Perhaps I had better not tell you, ma'am. But Carson was saying to me that you were the only one who didn't guess by *whose orders* the poor dogs were lost, and whose money paid for their not being found again."

"If I thought that; if I believed Mr. Christopher had been so cowardly—so *meanly* cruel—so brutally despicable! I'd—I'd——"

"There, there! don't take on," Ann interrupted soothingly. "I ought not to have told you what was thought. You see, you had better make the best of it. All your anger won't bring the poor dogs back, and it's better to live peaceful if you can."

"If I can."

"You're young; you have the best of it. There's many a long day for you in the course of nature, and not so many for Mr. Christopher, I should say. He's altered, and not for the better, since I saw him in London—grown puffier; it's not healthy flesh. He'd go out like the snuff of a candle if he had an illness."

"Hush! you turn me sick," Sylvia said, growing ghastly pale. This woman, with her hints, innuendoes and ghoulish suggestions, was becoming a nightmare to her instead of the comfort she had anticipated. Just then she heard her husband's voice making inquiries for her in tones that were more masterful and aggressive than affectionate, and again a feeling of anger and indignation against him quickened her pulses, and brought the blood in a rosy rush to her face.

"Tell Mr. Christopher that I have tired myself up in the hills, and that I shall lie down and rest until it's time to dress for dinner. You can go now, Ann. I'll ring when I want you."

Ann went, but in a few minutes she returned.

"Mr. Christopher got caught in that shower just now, ma'am, and he thinks he has taken a chill. He's shivering terrible, and says will you go to him."

Sylvia rose up reluctantly. She was conscious herself that she was not in a frame of mind to be a sympathetic help-meet to her husband. However, it was better to go and get the scolding over, which she knew awaited her, than to lie down with a vague desire for rest while her mind was tortured with vain misgivings and repinings.

Accordingly she went to his dressing-room, and found him

lying back in a comfortable, plumply upholstered arm-chair. His usually florid face looked patchy, and he seemed to be exhausted.

"A nice tramp I have had after you," he began harshly. "I've caught a chill, and feel very ill. Where have you been?"

"Up on the hills. I am sorry you have caught a chill."

"Sorry! much good your sorrow will do me," he snarled. "I wanted you particularly. I had a telegram giving me very good news. Two of the bank notes paid by Melling to the person who sold him your ring have been changed by —Whom do you think?"

"I can't imagine."

"Your friend, Mr. Richard Ogilvie, late of some second-rate London suburb, now of Dene Prior, and soon, I hope, of Holloway gaol."

A knife going through her heart would have hurt her less than these words. She tried to cry aloud, "It's a lie!" but her voice did not rise above a whisper. The next moment she had staggered forward, and fallen half on, half against the table in a fainting fit that looked painfully like death to those who came in response to his furious ringing of the bell.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANN WASHES GLASSES.

MRS. STANMER had died without ever having consciousness enough to learn that she was not what she had believed herself to be—the wife, namely, of the late owner and mother of the present possessor of Dene Prior.

Mrs. Warrenner had gone back to the Rectory, taking Rose Davenport with her. It was evident that Rose required rest after the strain of the last week or two, and apparently she had no desire to go home to her own people. Belle Warrenner put this down to Rose's desire to stay near Arthur. Therefore she would have been considerably surprised if she had witnessed a scene that was enacted in the Dene Prior garden the day after Mrs. Stanmer's death.

Rose had gone out to gather white flowers from the conservatories to make wreaths and crosses, and before she had been engaged on her task many minutes she was joined by Mr.

Ogilvie—the most solitary, friendless man in the house of which he was master. She held her hand out to him warmly, asking him at once to help her cut the flowers, and sparing him the apologies which any one else would have offered him for taking them without his leave.

"I saw you come out here, and I ventured to follow you. I feel awfully in the way," he said in reply to her greeting.

"You ought not to feel it. No one could have been more considerate and kinder than you have been; and now you're going to be kind to me and help me make a wreath—will you?"

"Willingly. I'd gladly help you to do anything. If it hadn't been for Mrs. Warrener and you, I should have felt myself an utter outcast and pariah."

"Don't forget Belle."

"Oh, yes! she has been kind, but she will never really like me. She naturally feels too deeply for Arthur to forgive my existence, though when she is my sister-in-law I hope she will persuade him to be friendly with me."

"You think she will be your sister-in-law?"

"They're very much in love with each other. I have known that for a long time."

"So have I," Rose said slowly, "but I'm afraid he will hesitate to marry her now. The blot on his 'scutcheon will hinder him, he is so proud."

"She must overcome any silly scruple on his part. She will, if she really loves him."

Then he looked at her steadily, and, without calculating on what might be the effect of his action, he laid his hand on hers as she was in the act of cutting a spray of double myrtle.

"You would—if you loved him?"

"I would—if I loved him."

She made no effort to withdraw her hand; on the contrary, she held his with a grasp in which there was a strong promise of sympathy and friendship, and looked him steadily in the eyes with a glance in which there was no coquetry or shadow of falseness. He felt his pulses throbbing with a new-born feeling for her. He had not forgotten Sylvia, but he remembered that she was unattainable and entirely lost to him.

"There was a time when you might have learnt to feel for my brother Arthur what Miss Warrener feels for him?"

"There was—a very brief time. Before I began to learn the lesson I discovered that he was in love with Belle."

"Lucky Arthur, to have even had such a possibility as you before him."

"He never had it," she said, smiling rather sadly. "My dear old friend, his mother, tried her best to make us fond of each other in that way, and failed."

"Do you remember that day when I came here as a wine merchant's traveller?"

"I shall never forget it."

"How good you were, both to me and my horse. I shall ask you to be good to me again one day. May I come and see you at the Rectory?"

"Of course you may."

"Your friendship is very precious to me, Miss Davenport. If I ever lose it, I shall feel as if I were being cast into outer darkness."

"You never will lose it," she said, and then he released her hand, but retained the bit of double myrtle.

"You were gathering it for a funeral wreath, but it is a bridal flower. Let me keep it as a good omen."

"You may keep it——"

"And augur what I wish from it?"

"And augur what you wish from it. And now we must go in and be industrious, or Mrs. Warrener will take me away before I have made my wreaths."

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That same day Richard Ogilvie was arrested on suspicion of having been concerned in the sapphire and diamond ring robbery, from information received from the landlord of the "Stanmer Arms," and of a butcher in the village in which he (Dick) had lodged previous to coming into his inheritance. He was taken to London and searched, and in his pocket-book two or three more of the criminating notes were found. He refused to say how they came into his possession, sent for an eminent counsel, to whom he intrusted his defence, and, with Rose's sprig of myrtle in his button-hole, prepared to await his trial with consummate coolness and cheerfulness.

"Don't you be alarmed, mother," he said to her when she

came to see him, broken down and crushed by fears that she could not banish ; " I am all right enough—as innocent as you are. It's a hell-cat of a woman has landed me in this plight."

And though she questioned him closely and cleverly, that was all he would tell her.

Rose wrote to him once, avowing her absolute faith in his innocence, and every day she sent him flowers. But from Sylvia there came no word or sign, and he feared *that* she had been poisoned against him. He did not *know* *that* Sylvia was being kept as close a prisoner, *nearly*, as he was himself, and that never an opportunity *was* given her of writing or posting a letter *unknown* to her lord and master.

Mr. Christopher had grown tired of Roche's Hotel. A fellow-visitor had been laid up there with an attack of influenza, and Mr. Christopher declared that the whole atmosphere of the hotel was rife with infection. The chill he had taken in driving from Bantry to Glengariff, aggravated by his long walk among the hills in the heat of the day, when he was searching for his wife to give her the "good news" of Dick Ogilvie's arrest, was the root of the evil. But its branches were many, and he had hardly removed himself and his belongings from the hotel into lodgings in a village nearer to Bantry, when various dangerous complications arose, and he became seriously ill.

He was not an interesting or a grateful patient on whom to attend. But Sylvia's kind, forgiving heart softened at sight of his sufferings, and made her honestly desirous of alleviating them as far as she was able to do it. The racking pains which possessed his whole frame, tearing at him like so many demons bent upon torturing every bone, nerve, muscle and fibre in his body, made him intolerant of anything like noise, roughness, or loud speech. Sylvia's light footstep and soft voice, her prompt, quiet movements and intuitive perception of whatever he wanted without giving him the trouble of asking for it, soon became the sole sources of solace left to him in life. He hated to see Ann, or to hear her stealthy step in his room, and he had a sweeping objection to being waited upon by Irish women-servants. His valet was useful, and not an irritating element. Mr. Christopher could endure to let his man wait upon him as far as his duties of valet went. But he would neither take physic nor food from Jennings'

hands. Sylvia, he insisted, must bring him everything that he ate and drank.

She performed her duty unwearyingly and cheerfully, being always on the alert, and never seeming to feel fatigue. Sometimes she ventured to express the hope that as soon as he was well enough to travel he would let her make arrangements for their getting back to his Devonshire home without delay, as the difficulties attendant on catering for the needs of an invalid were many in that wild Irish parish. But very shortly she realized that he was growing worse instead of better. Then she entreated to be allowed to send for her mother. But he had conceived a dislike to Mrs. Gould, and he told Sylvia rather roughly "that he would have no one about him who would be likely to enter into an alliance with his wife against him."

She repented herself bitterly now of the hard words and thoughts in which she had indulged against him that day when they quarrelled about Dick Ogilvie's letter. It seemed to her that God was punishing her for her frivolity and foolish words on that occasion by giving her cause for lasting remorse if Mr. Christopher should really die now. She resolutely kept her thoughts away from Dick Ogilvie, not even satisfying her burning anxiety to see what was said about him in the English papers. There was a poor sort of expiation for her sin in having uttered that rash wish for her husband's death, she hoped, in this total abstinence from taking any expressed or active interest in poor, ill-used, unjustly-accused Dick.

One evening she was sitting in his darkened room, keeping very quiet, as she fancied he was sleeping. The rack on which influenza was stretching him made sleep the greatest blessing that could be given him. Ann had been away in Bantry, getting various articles that the village could not supply, and for some hours Mr. Christopher had scarcely spoken. She was longing for light, fresh air, freedom to stretch her tired, cramped young limbs in a good walk through the lovely green meadows and fern-fringed lanes which encircled the village. A sudden impulse made her stretch forward to the open window and pull the blind on one side, drawing a deep breath as she did so in order to inhale as much as was possible of the sweet evening air. As she did so Mr. Christopher opened his eyes, heard the long-drawn breath, and asked fractiously :

"Are you sighing?"

"No, indeed," she answered brightly, getting up and going to the bedside. "I was drawing in as much as I could of this lovely soft air. You have slept for more than four hours. You are feeling better, are you not?"

He turned groaning with the pain the movement caused him.

"Better! I shall never be better in this world," he began feebly. Then he stopped and groaned again, and Sylvia, filled with self-reproach, flew to the door and called for the new milk which he was to have with a dessert-spoonful of brandy in it directly he awoke.

It was brought to the door by Ann, a glass jug full of rich creamy Kilkenny cows' milk, and as Mrs. Christopher measured the brandy into it she said hopefully:

"This will make you feel stronger. Put your arm round my shoulder and rest on me while you drink it."

He was half sitting up, sipping it slowly, when Ann crept into the room.

"Let me have the jug to scald out, ma'am. I like to see to whatever milk is put in myself. Milk is such a poisonous thing if one isn't particular, and I don't like their Irish ways of washing up."

"Oh, they're clean, beautifully clean, in this house," Mrs. Christopher said reproachfully. "There's some milk left in the jug, Ann. Don't take it away."

But Ann was gone.

"Keep that woman out of my room; I can't bear the sight or sound of her," Mr. Christopher said fretfully. "And, Sylvia!—stay up with me to-night. I don't like the nurse the doctor sends for night-work. She falls asleep and snores, and I can't help thinking that she takes more of the brandy than I do."

"I will stay with you certainly, gladly too, for I'm sure I wait on you better than any one, though I did annoy you sometimes when you were well. Let the nurse come and sit with you while I go and change into a dressing-gown."

"Don't be long," he said imploringly. He was getting to feel that Sylvia was very necessary to him, and in a dim and misty way he was resolving that when he got better he would make it up to her, and try and make her happy.

When Sylvia came back, having made her sitting-up toilet for

the night, she found the hired nurse looking distressed and anxious.

"There's been a change since you left the room, ma'am," she said hurriedly. "Send for the doctor at once."

"Give him some brandy—he is faint," Sylvia cried, alarmed.

"Your maid came in as soon as you left and took all the glasses away. She said she wanted to wash them——"

"Quick! quick! call Jennings—brandy at once. Oh! what is that?"

"He's gone to God," the nurse said reverently, and Sylvia covered her face as she realized that a mighty conqueror had possession of the room, and that He had rent the power from her of ever making amends for her hard words to and harder thoughts of the man she had married.

CHAPTER XXV.

"NO FURY LIKE A WOMAN SCORNEO."

AFTER his first interview with the leading counsel who was to defend him, Dick's spirits rose elastically. It had not been pleasant to him to confess to whom he owed the money the possession of which had brought him into this trouble. There was nothing criminal about the circumstances attending the transaction, but there was much that was horribly humiliating.

If this episode in his life could be obliterated, he felt that he could hold up his head before the world and fearlessly offer himself with hands on which there was no suspicion of a stain to Rose Davenport. He had done many wild, reckless and reprehensible things. But he felt now that his quiescent acceptance of the ridiculous devotion which had culminated in Ann's offering the money to him, had been a mean and contemptible thing. He had accepted pecuniary aid from a woman who had offered it to him, because she had an absurd and almost unnatural (considering their relative ages) passion for him. A woman, too, who though connected distantly with his mother's family, had always been in a lower social position than himself. An uneducated woman, with the habits, modes of speech and manners of the class to which she belonged, and which had always galled him, even when he was accepting kindness from her. He was crushed with mortification now as he reviewed these facts from

his present stand-point, and he would gladly have given a year's income if he could have established his innocence without letting it be made public that the person who had led him into the trap had been a kind of pecuniary providence to him.

Consequences are pitiless. If he had only faced poverty like a man in his extravagant young days when he was on the stage, and the salary he drew hardly paid for his board and lodgings, what a happy fellow he might be now. Instead of that he had gone with the stream of thoughtless companions, who drank and played and drove in hansoms, when even omnibus fares would have taxed their resources. And then, when poverty pinched him, he had flinched from the pinch, accepted alleviating aid that was degrading to his manhood. And this was the end of it.

It was poor consolation to reflect that as soon as he came into possession of his property, he had sent Ann a cheque for a far larger amount than she had ever "lent" him, as he called it now. This late repayment would not blot out the fact that he had taken money from a woman who only gave it to him because she had an unholy affection for him: an affection which, though he had never fallen so low as even to feign to return it, he had "tolerated" for the sake of what it brought him.

"After it all came out, would he ever be able to look Rose Davenport in the face again?" His self-accusations, his remorse, his paroxysms of shame, all culminated in this one question, which he was perpetually asking himself.

He had not heard of Mr. Christopher's death. There had been a line in the *Times* obituary, but it had escaped him. In two or three Irish papers there had been suspicious comments on the occurrence, but these he had not seen when his own trial came off.

There was one drop of sweetness in the bitter cup he had to drink that day: a note from Rose Davenport, saying:

"Whatever happens, I am convinced of your innocence; I shall be at the door of the court to meet you when you come out.—Your ROSE."

Not even the stinging thought that she would be in court and hear all the humiliating details of the affair could rob this promise of hers of the exquisite pleasure it gave him.

The witnesses for the prosecution were only three: Melling

himself, the jeweller, who had paid the notes away in part payment for the ring; Mrs. Watts, to whom Dick had given one five-pound note; and the landlord of the "Stanmer Arms," who had received the telegram which the press and public opinion declared to be so damning. Dick's only witness was Ann herself, who was brought over from Ireland the day after Mr. Christopher's death, and who showed a remarkable readiness to come; hurrying preparations for her departure, in fact, and avoiding an interview with her mistress, who was stupefied with surprise and terror of something undefinable in the air.

There was no opposition made by any one to Ann's leaving the lodgings with the stranger who had called to see her. Jennings was at the village inn, relating all that had happened and much that had not to an admiring audience. The hired nurse was "settling the room" in which the corpse was lying, and the young widow was lying numb with fright and remorse on her bed in a darkened room. She had caught a sound of the word "inquest," exchanged between the doctor and nurse, and it all seemed very, very awful to her.

Ann went back quite cheerfully to London and expressed herself as being rather pleased than otherwise at being retained as a witness for the defence. "She hadn't much to tell," she observed, "but Mr. Ogilvie's counsel must feel sure that when she was put in the witness-box, she would speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me, God."

Her quotation of the whole of the oath at this preliminary stage was quite uncalled for, but she seemed to take a grim pleasure in uttering it.

* * * * *

Down at Prior Common, the one topic naturally was the terrible accusation brought against the young squire. The landlord of the "Stanmer Arms" found himself suddenly famous through being the proud recipient of that telegram. A thousand different opinions prevailed; but there was a general sentiment among the servants and *employés* on the Dene Prior estate, that "he would come off with flying colours," and bring to open shame the wicked ones who had entangled him in their net.

The general impression among both factions, those who thought him guilty and those who believed him innocent, was

that he was the victim of the vindictiveness of some vicious woman, upon whose unknown head other women all earnestly hoped that some hitherto undreamed of destruction might fall.

Rose Davenport was the only person who would not speculate and discuss and suspect and argue about him. She stayed on at the Rectory, well understood by Mrs. Warrener, who knew that the girl clung to her (Mrs. Warrener) because she had been "good to Dick," when every other man and woman's hand seemed against him, because he had been proved to be his own father's son. When afternoon callers came and canvassed the subject of the "shameful accusation against poor dear Mr. Ogilvie," and contradicted each other and themselves, and raised up ghosts of the quite too terrible "person" who was probably "at the bottom of it all," Rose said nothing. But when they addressed her directly, asking her if it wasn't shocking, and pitiable, and disgraceful, all in a breath, Miss Davenport had her cool serene answer ready:

"He is quite a real friend of mine, you know, so of course I am sorry for this temporary unpleasantness."

"But—the disgrace, Miss Davenport!"

"Is there any disgrace in being innocent of having sold a stolen ring? If there is I am afraid it must attach to him."

Then the bolder spirits among them would hint at there being some "entanglement with a woman" at the bottom of the mystery. But Rose by this time was very much in earnest in her determination to be staunch to the faulty fellow, who was, she knew, "no hero, but a man."

So she sent him the sweetest flowers she could find daily, both from his own and the Rectory gardens and conservatories, and in each flower he found a promise of something better than he had ever yet known.

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There had gone a frantic, incoherently-worded telegram from Sylvia to her mother as soon as the telegraph office was open at Bantry, the morning after Mr. Christopher's death, but when it reached 10, Blessington Terrace, the house was shut up and the occupants had gone. There was only a caretaker, who through the intricate fumes of much too early taken gin, saw her way to stating that the "family was out of town, and had left no address

with her," and who regarded the telegraph boy with a fiercely watery eye. So it was wired back that "Gould, 10, Blessington Terrace, was gone," and on receipt of this "returned message paid," Sylvia seemed to lose her last hold on life.

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The record of all the details of Dick Ogilvie's trial would not be interesting, nor would it further the action of the story which is being told in these pages. The effects which influenced the result, and in turn the influence which that result exercised over after events, are the sole things that need be dealt with in connection with the affair.

To begin with, it was curious, but nevertheless true, that rabid jealousy of pretty Mrs. Watts, the widow, made Ann determine upon swearing hard that she had never seen the criminating bank-notes, much less given them to Ogilvie. It would be only her oath against his simple denial of guilt. It would naturally be argued that she, a poor servant, could have no object in denying that which if proved would clear his character. She would punish him for having, as she thought, flirted with the fair and lively widow, by implying that it was the owner of the ring who had surreptitiously parted with it in order to raise funds for her lover. The woman was as hungrily and selfishly "fond," as she called it, of Dick as ever. But she had worked herself up into such a passion of jealous mortification at his preference for Mrs. Watts, that she was not only ready, but eager to disgrace and destroy him. "He'll know then that he lost a good friend when he flung me off for his silly giggling fool of a landlady," she thought savagely, "and then he'll hate her, the stuck-up thing, and the other one as well for being his rewing."

By "the other one" she meant Mrs. Christopher, whose decline and fall in Dick's estimation and the eyes of the world would be a foretaste of Paradise. By what means she was to fill their vacant places in his heart she had not yet determined.

Accordingly she told her false story in the witness-box glibly. On the day in question, when the sapphire and diamond ring was missed, she distinctly remembered seeing it on Miss Sylvia's (now Mrs. Christopher's) finger while that lady was bathing her dogs. The dogs were two white bull-terriers; Miss Sylvia was devoted to them. They had been given to her by Mr. Ogilvie.

After luncheon on that day Miss Sylvia had gone out alone. She had then come home and taken Miss Warrener (a visitor) to Mrs. Ogilvie's (the accused's mother), where she had met Mr. Ogilvie and spent the whole afternoon, returning home late for dinner. Mr. Christopher, the gentleman Miss Sylvia was engaged to, since dead—(Dick's heart stood still at this abrupt announcement of a fact hitherto unknown to him)—made a great fuss about the loss of the ring—it was the engagement ring—but Miss Sylvia could never bear to hear the subject mentioned. She (witness) had always had doubts herself from Miss Sylvia's manner that she had sold her own ring and parted with the money in a way she was ashamed of.

This, with many additions and embellishments, was the substance of the story told by Ann; a story to which Dick had to listen in silence, while such a tempest of indignation, rage and shame as had never overtaken him before warred in his heart. If he could have killed the woman as she stood there, with her horrible swarthy coarse face held up audaciously, he would have done it and felt that he was not guilty of murder.

Sharp examination and cross-examination failed to shake her statement. She adhered to her story tenaciously, and the case was adjourned until Mrs. Christopher could be called as an important witness in the case.

Dick would rather have heard a sentence of penal servitude passed on himself than have been the cause of bringing Sylvia into such a position. But it was too late for him to be able to save her from this humiliation. He was helpless, and the woman he had loved thoughtlessly, selfishly, but very *truly*, until he had met Rose Davenport, would have to suffer public ridicule and undeserved censure on his account.

Truly his pleasant sins were making themselves into a cat-o'-nine-tails wherewith to lash and lacerate him.

Ann went back to her lodgings after this exploit, feeling anything but elated at the turn things were taking. Though she had not been looking at him, she had been fully conscious of Dick's expression of loathing, hatred and contempt for her. It really had not been worth her while to have "revenged herself" upon him, Sylvia and Mrs. Watts, only to find herself miserable because he did not like her the better for having done it. She cried a good deal over her supper of strong tea and well-

vinegared shell-fish that night, and felt a good deal of loyal pity for herself, and spite against "all them stuck-up nasty bold hussies as called themselves ladies," for having goaded her into this unsatisfactory situation. Later on, under the influence of more stimulating sustenance, she longed to go and throw herself at Dick's feet, implore his pardon, and offer to make a full recantation of her false evidence.

But the necessity of waiting for the morning stepped in and weakened her resolution.

(To be continued.)